

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

At the end of World War I, the southern part of the thousand year old historical Hungary was occupied by Serbian troops. Under the terms of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1921 it was annexed to the Serbo-Croat-Slovenian Kingdom, that later became Yugoslavia. The new name of this territory, situated to the east of present Croatia, was VOJVODINA (also spelled Voivodina or Voyvodina). Its former Hungarian name had been Bácska and Bánát.

During World War II, in 1941, Germany occupied Yugoslavia. At the same time, Hungary took possession of and re-annexed VOJVODINA from divided Yugoslavia. At the end of 1944, the Serbs reoccupied Bácska, which has belonged to Serbia ever since.

During the German occupation, a strong Serbian partisan movement developed with Communist leadership, which also spread over to Bácska, reannexed to Hungary at the time. The Hungarian military leadership organized anti-partisan raids and summary courts-martial against the participants in and sympathizers with the partisan movement. The biggest anti-partisan campaign took place in and around Novi Sad, in Hungarian, Ujvidék, where several hundred individuals suspected to be partisans, among them innocent people as well, were arrested and executed in the course of a three-day raid in January 1942. Although the army of every country treats partisans the same way, law-abiding Hungarian public opinion condemned the military leadership for the harsh action. Miklós Horthy, regent of Hungary, ordered an investigation against the organizers of the campaign. It is probably a unique incident in world history that a belligerent nation calls its own army to account for transgressions against the enemy. In my novel *Cold Days*, written in 1960, I related the story of the atrocities committed in Novi Sad in order to clear our consciences by sincerely revealing our own mistakes.

The three "**Cold Days**" were followed by "**freezing weeks**" in the whole territory of VOJVODINA in 1944, when the Serbians brutally massacred 40,000 Hungarian civilians, the overwhelming majority of them innocent beyond any doubt, in

revenge of the execution of 3,000 suspected Serbian partisans. The commander-in-chief of the partisan army, Marshal Tito, as far as we know, did not give any expressed written command to butcher the Hungarians in Bácska. He did condon and apparently orally directed his partisans in the whole territory of Yugoslavia - including Vojvodina - to revenge all "injustices" suffered by partisans and Serbians during the four years of the war. In other words, where a stream of blood flowed in 1942, a torrent of blood should gush in 1944.

In the course of the partisans three-year struggle for self-defence against the Nazis, but mainly against royalist chetniks and independence seeking Croats, homicidal traditions smouldering under the ashes ever since the Middle Ages were revived, enriching the various manners of death with numerous cruel novelties. While the Hungarian military justice executed the condemned one by one, the Serbian partisans bound ten or fifteen people with wire and killed them with a round of firearms. They had lined them up in front of the previously dug common graves so that they would only have to bury them with the earth that they themselves had dug from the pit. Whereas the sentence of Hungarian summary courts was hanging or shooting, the Serbian partisans killed their victims after various forms of torture. Sometimes they bound together ten or more men in a circle around a straw or hay stack, then set fire to the stack. The victims dragged each other into the flames; they all burnt alive. Elsewhere, the captives were tortured before execution by walking barefoot over a carpet of glowing embers several metres long. Where the captors had enough time, they tore off all twenty nails of the victims with pliers. The enjoyment of seeing them suffer was enhanced if they went to a nearby smithy to make the tools red hot on the forge. Wherever they were able to find coal, they took the opportunity of roasting the victims alive. When they skinned somebody alive - usually prominent people who had to be punished prominently, a well-to-do burgomaster, lawyer or physician -, even some of the partisan women were on the verge of fainting, as numerous women also took part in these brutalities.

They were especially cruel to priests and monks. In most cases, they stripped them naked and cut a strap in the shape of a cross from their backs. Then, for the sake of the toughest partisan women, they started to deal with their genitals, tearing their testicles with pliers, cutting off the penis. If there was a forge nearby, they burnt the penis of clergymen with red hot iron, repeating the torture for several days. Modern sawmills also gave ideas for new methods of killing.

Mutilation of the hands or feet with large circular saws was an example of murder with long and excruciating pain. Once the guiltless owner of the sawmill stayed home with all of his family. The troop, punishing without formal sentence, bound all the family to the sawing-bench, and started the machine that cut the man, the woman and the children into two.

Here we should stop to rest after enumerating these horrors, but we must mention another method of killing, the medieval or even older tradition of impalement. The last recorded instance of impalement took place in 1907 in Rumania. That is how Rumanian royal law punished the leaders of the peasant's uprising. Serbia was the only place that still had some "experts" in the art even in 1944. These experts were impaling executioners who preserved the "tradition" of the form of execution causing the greatest possible suffering, as described below:

A pale more than three meters long must be peeled smooth. It must have an iron tip and it should be made slippery with grease. The victim is laid flat on his belly and his torturers step on his shoulders and his bottom so that he would not be able to move. They put a loop on both of his ankles and the two executioner's assistants pull his legs in opposite directions. The chief executioner cuts the trousers on the thighs with his sharp knife, not sparing live flesh. Then he fits the tip of the pale covered with iron into the anus, paying attention to set it in a way that the pale goes along the spine, not touching the heart, so that the victim will suffer long enough. Then he takes a club and hammers the pale in the marked direction, while his aids pull the body onto the pale by the ankles. The tip of the pale should come out behind the clavicle. At this moment, they put the paled man into the formerly dug ditch and it is the triumph of the executioner and the delighted audience if the man groans on the pale for several hours...