

A BACKGROUND REPORT

To the file
FREE EUROPE PRESS DIVISION

Free Europe Committee

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DATE: December 13, 1957

SUBJECT: General Pal Maleter

Reference: Recent Reports from Vienna Indicate that Gen. Maleter May Have Gone on Trial in Budapest

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1. Biographical Sketch

Born in 1920 in Kassa, Hungary, the son of intellectuals. He graduated from the "Ludovika" military academy as a lieutenant in 1942. During the war he was on active duty but at one point he went over to the Russians, fighting on their side with the rank of captain. In 1945, after the war he was troop officer, battalion commander, then in 1947 Commander of the Guards with the rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1949 he worked for the Ministry of Defense, in charge of partisan-training. Member of the Hungarian Communist Party.

2. His Role in the Revolution

At the time of the outbreak of the revolution there were no soldiers at the Kilian barracks. The building was used as a workers' lodging. The first revolutionary center was formed across the street, in the Corvin passage. This group managed to obtain arms, some of which they gave to the workers in the Kilian barracks. Thus armed the workers were firing at the Russians from the roof of the barracks on the 24th. The group in the Corvin passage did the same. Pal Maleter received orders to disarm these groups. Maleter set out on October 25th, at the head of an armed-car detail and he fired at both groups; the workers in the Kilian barracks and those in the Corvin passage.

On October 26 Pal Maleter was inside the barracks when his men captured a 16-year old freedom fighter and this boy was taken to Maleter. The boy displayed great courage.

Instead of being frightened and pleading for his life he said to Maleter:

"YOU MAY ORDER MY EXECUTION, BUT THAT WILL NOT ALTER THE FACT THAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR THE PEOPLE, WHILE YOU SHOOT UNDER RUSSIAN ORDERS. YOU OUGHT TO BE ON THE SIDE OF THE PEOPLE."

The attitude of the boy made a deep impression on Maleter. He asked to be left alone with the boy and at the end of several hours with him he announced that he had decided to join the people.

Later on contact was established between Maleter and the Corvin Passage group although the latter maintained a certain reserve towards Maleter; they could not forget that at the outset Maleter ordered his men to shoot at them. Even the fact that Maleter gave them arms failed to dispel this resentment.

On October 27 a civilian managed to get through the Russian lines, under the pretext of delivering milk, and he got to Maleter. The man was Gabor Magas, an agriculturist and an old friend of Maleter. Magas told Maleter that he was approached by an AVH officer who informed him that he knew where the regime had kept secret files and suggested that seizing these would be of great advantage because they would surely shed light on many secret issues. Maleter replied that he himself could not get out of the barracks because these were surrounded by Russian troops and suggested that Magas approach someone else who could be of greater assistance. Maleter was in charge of the fighting and his men managed to disable some 17 tanks.

On October 28 Tibor Dery visited Maleter in the barracks and they had a long talk, at which by the way Gabor Magas was also present. In the course of the discussion Maleter said among other things:

"MY DECISION TO TAKE THE SIDE OF THE PEOPLE WAS GREATLY INFLUENCED BY THE ARTICLES OF THE IRODALMI UJSAG", (LITERARY GAZETTE, organ of the Hungarian Writer's Association.)

On October 29 Istvan Kovacs called on Pal Maleter and together they went over to the Corvin Passage to discuss the conditions of the surrender of the Corvin group. After that Maleter returned to the Kilian barracks.

On November 1 Maleter left the barracks to go to the Ministry of Defense.

On November 2 the "Committee Preparing the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops" met for the first time in the Parliament building. Minister of State Ferenc Erdei, Major-General Istvan Kovacs, Col. Miklos Szucs and Pal Maleter, by then holding the rank of Major-General, were also on the committee.

On November 13 two meetings took place. The first in the Parliament Building and the second at the Soviet

Military Headquarters in Tokol. According to information which seems to be reliable, as soon as the members of the committee arrived at Tokol and entered the building where the meeting was to take place, Soviet troops arrested the drivers and took the license numbers off the cars in which the committee came. The committee members knew nothing of this. It is said that the Soviets gave the Hungarians a very friendly welcome. A good dinner was served and they toasted Soviet-Hungarian friendship. Later on, however, Serow and his group arrived and the Chairman of the Soviets was forced to leave while the Hungarians were arrested.

3. Free Radio Kossuth (Budapest) Broadcast of November 1, 1956, including a statement by Gen. Maleter:

"During these heroic days the whole world has learned to admire the Kilian barracks. Since yesterday (Oct. 31, 1956) the name of a Hungarian officer is being mentioned in connection with the Kilian barracks. The man, commander and inspiring comrade of the fighters, is Col. Pal Maleter. He was in command over the freedom fighters who had stood their ground for 7 days in the barracks which they had turned into a fortress. During the difficult hours the people kept telling each other: the Kilian barracks is fighting, it is putting up a fierce resistance. Even at the time when endless rows of Soviet tanks rumbled down the Ulloi Street, when heavy guns boomed without pause and when it seemed that the overwhelming power had to crush the heroes of the barracks. Their guns were silenced, but the gate was still guarded by sandbags. There is just a small opening, hardly enough for a man to get through. We squeeze in and look for Col. Maleter. It is almost impossible to find him. It is a large building and Col. Maleter seems to be everywhere, with the soldiers, the young freedomfighters. Finally we find the tall, grey but strikingly youthful-looking man in one of the courts. He parried every personal question. There is not time to waste on my person, he says. We must talk of deeds and of tomorrow. As he won't say more we want to point out that this is not the first time in his life that he has fought for Hungarian freedom. In the difficult days of 1944, when Hungary faced the deathly danger of Fascism, Pal Maleter fought at the head of a partisan group. Then just as now the independence of our country was in danger. His military knowledge, organizational skill, and his overwhelming love for his country were the decisive factors which turned the Kilian barracks into an unconquerable fortress, which forced even heavy Russian guns into withdrawal.

"His men tore the Soviet insignia from their uniforms during the first hour, replacing it with the Hungarian one which is now universal in the Hungarian army. There are three stars on his jacket and a row of decorations. Gen. Maleter says: 'We do trust the provisional government and shall support it all the way, because we are convinced that it seeks to bring order and peace into our country. We know Zoltan Tildy and Imre Nagy; we are aware of their decent stand and we know that they have fought for the people with all their might and that they represent the people. The freedom fighters, heroes of the armed battle, will remain composed. I appeal to the population of Budapest to keep calm, not to permit anyone to create trouble. At the same time I want to assure you that the Hungarian army, together with the armed youth will guarantee order and peace in Budapest. Not only have we faith in the government--the government has faith in us. Consequently, we shall not surrender our arms, but together with the army units and the police, which is still loyal to the people, we will maintain calm and peace in Budapest. Yesterday we started

the job of putting things in order. Today we go on with it and shall continue up until the time when the joyous news may be announced, that Budapest is again the capital of a free Hungary; a city of calm and peaceful labor.'"

4. Maleter's Appeal to the Hungarian Workers

"Fellow countrymen! During the armed uprising every fighting man was proud to know that the workers supported their efforts by going on a strike. However, every war must be followed by a period of peaceful construction in an effort to perpetuate the achievements of the revolution. The purpose of the strike is to weaken the enemy. However, at present the workers' strike does not weaken the enemy but ourselves. We must give milk to our children, coal to our factories, transportation facilities to the workers, anxious to return to their families, or else we shall lose everything we have achieved through the sacrifice of lives.

Hungarian workers, give your support to a free, independent and neutral Hungary, our beloved country. Return to your jobs!" (Radio Kossuth, November 1, 1956)

5. Maleter's Statement on the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops

"Pal Maleter announced that last Wednesday, Mikoyan declared to Minister of State Kis that in accordance with the Warsaw Pact, Soviet troops stationed on Hungarian soil will be withdrawn." (Free Radio Kossuth, November 3)

6. Maleter's Military Rank and Positions During the Revolution

October 25, 1956: As an army colonel he sets out to liquidate the armed revolutionary groups at the Kilian barracks and the Corvin passage.

October 30, 1956: Becomes member of the Revolutionary Army Committee of the Hungarian Republic.

October 30, 1956: Presidium of the People's Republic appoints Pal Maleter first deputy to the Minister of Defense.

November 1, 1956: Maleter holds the rank of major-general and the government appoints him to the Committee Preparing the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops.

November 3, 1956: The Presidium of the People's Republic appoints Maleter to Minister of Defense.

7. Last Report on Pal Maleter by Free Radio Kossuth:

November 4, 1956 at 5:56 A.M.

"IMRE NAGY, PREMIER OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, CALLS ON PAL MALETER, MINISTER OF DEFENSE...AS WELL AS ON THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION, WHO WENT TO SOVIET HEAD-QUARTERS AT 10 P.M. LAST NIGHT, AND WHO HAVE NOT RETURNED YET, TO RETURN IMMEDIATELY AND RESUME THEIR DUTIES."

8. Legal Opinion on the Nature of Any Trial

Up to the present the Hungarian communist press or radio has made absolutely no mention of the arrest or trial of Pal Maleter. Therefore, even if a trial should take place it is not known what the charges would be. However, it may be assumed that Maleter would be accused on the basis of Act VII/1946, Section 1, which rules:

1. "He who initiates, organizes or gives financial support to any movement, aimed at the overthrow of the democratic state order, called into life under Act I/1946."

"Acts defined under point 1, Section I are punished by death, forced labor for life or, in the case of physical disability, life imprisonment..." (Act VII/1956, Section 10)

Of course, from a strictly legal point of view the above does not apply to Pal Maleter and his associates.

Upon the demands of the Hungarian revolution, the Presidium of the People's Republic elected Imre Nagy Prime Minister on October 24, 1956. The legality of his position was not contested even by persons or organs, installed or created by the Soviet military intervention. Thus Istvan Dobi, Chairman of the Presidium of the Hungarian People's Republic, said at a parliamentary meeting in May:

"The Presidium of the Hungarian People's Republic elected Imre Nagy Prime Minister in full compliance with the provisions of the Constitution." (Nepszabadsag, May 10, 1957)

As the legally elected Prime Minister, Imre Nagy, in a radio address, delivered on October 28, 1956, stated that he considered the Hungarian revolution warranted and justified:

"The government disapproves of views, contending that the present powerful stirring of the people is a counter-revolution...It is unquestionable that a national democratic movement, inspiring and uniting our whole nation, won expression with elemental force in recent events.

"The aims of this movement were to assure national independence, self-determination and sovereignty, the unfolding of our social, economic and political democracy, as the only basis of socialism in our country...Amidst fighting democratic unity, independence and a socialist government were born which will become the true representative of the people's will..." (Free Radio Kossuth, October 28, 1956).

Thus Pal Maleter's action of going over to the side of the people during the first days of the revolution and

fighting for national freedom was pronounced warranted and justified by Imre Nagy, the constitutional Prime Minister. Moreover, on October 30, 1956 Imre Nagy appointed Pal Maleter Minister of Defense and on November 1 he was appointed to the Committee for Preparation of the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops and it was in this capacity that he went to the Soviet Headquarters.

His warranted and justified act cannot become illegal through the fact that Hungary's independence and freedom was crushed by the November 4th Soviet intervention, in consequence of which a government was installed with absolute disregard for the people's will.

Note:

The material in this report is based upon what documentary information is available on Gen. Pal Maleter and on reports by Hungarian refugees who took some part in the revolt and knew of Maleter's record. It is of course extremely difficult to check the accuracy of information on East European leaders.