

~~SECRET~~

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN CENTER

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, István Deák, was born in Székesfehérvár, Hungary, on May 11, 1926, but grew up, together with my sister in Budapest. I had known Béla Stollár for quite a few years when the German army occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, and the persecution of Jews and those of Jewish origin began in earnest. From the beginning it was clear that Béla would do his best to save us all; we fully trusted him and had no reason, ever, to be disappointed.

In May 1944, was still able to graduate from high school but early in June, when my age group was called up for labor service, it was at his advice that I joined the service. His was the correct calculation because the otherwise notoriously anti-Semitic army treated the Jewish forced laborers relatively decently at that time. We were engaged in railroad building in Transylvania; the food and treatment were adequate, and until the Arrow Cross take-over in October 1944, no one had died in our company of 200 forced laborers. While in labor service, I corresponded with Béla Stollár, who gave me news of the family, illegally sent me food packages and money and, in general, took great risks in assisting me from afar.

Following the surrender of Romania on August 23, 1944, the German front collapsed and our labor company moved west, arriving in Budapest on October 15, the day Regent Horthy announced his intention of surrendering to the Soviet forces. The chaos on that day allowed me to escape from the group and not knowing where members of my family were, I went directly to Béla's apartment at Ráday utca 33/B. My father arrived here on the same day and we were hiding there for several more weeks. I never forget the strange scenes in the apartment where there were some times a dozen Jews in hiding.

Later, Béla arranged for me illegally to join a so-called KISKA unit, which was originally created under the Horthy regime to oppose a possible Arrow Cross putsch, but which under the Nazi leader Ferenc Szálasi served as a hiding place for Jews and military deserters. Please note that I am talking here about a unit other than the smaller one that Béla had set up and commanded. Although at one point we were arrested by SS units, we survived the siege of the city, and soon thereafter I was able to join my family all of whom had come out of hiding. We were then looking for Béla and found him, hastily buried, in a park near the place where he and his companions had died in a battle with the gendarmes and Arrow Cross militiamen.

Please note that had I not escaped for my labor service unit on October 15, an escape that would have been inconceivable without my being able to count on Béla Stollár's heroic assistance, I would have suffered the same fate of my companions who stayed with the unit, and who were later taken to the Austrian border to dig anti-tank ditches. There most of them were killed or died. In brief, without Béla neither I nor any other member of my family would be have survived. At the end, it was he who died for us and for humanity.

István Deák