

Commemoration of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956

by Gary Tischler

In 1956, as in any year of the 20th Century in which Time Magazine was a journalistic fixture, all sorts of people graced the cover of the instantly recognizable weekly news magazine. Many of the then famous, the important men and women who looked out at the world from a cover painting or photo reflected the national and international news of the time, or the cultural or political adulation or attention received by individuals. They were reflective of the news of the world, the undercurrents of change and the flashes of intense interest or turmoil unique to the moments.

The people ranged from movie stars like William Holden or the incandescent Marilyn Monroe, to the leaders of the free and not-free world like Dwight Eisenhower and Nikita Khrushchev, to musical artists like Duke Ellington and visual artists like Edward Hopper. You could guess at the stirrings of conflicts from covers that featured Israel's David Ben-Gurion early in the year, and Egyptian president Nasser later. One cover, indication of the ominous fear that was a part of our daily lives in those days was a cover that simply featured "The Missile."

But the Time Magazine "Man of the Year" for that year was not a movie star, not a president, not a thinker or politician, but a man, armed with a gun, staring intently out into the world, with determination, insisting that he be seen. On the January, 1957 cover, he was simply "Hungarian Patriot" and over time he became something more than that, an almost universal symbol of courage borne out of the desire for freedom, out of the need to fight oppression and suppression.

The events Hungary in 1956, flashed sharply, dramatically for a number of stirring months before the hopes of the uprising was dashed in October. It began with hope, and the possibility of autonomy and negotiation, and a brief but spectacular and violent triumph, followed by what seemed like a salutatory and joyous outcome of the breath of



freedom, and ended in an even more swift and even more violent suppression, and the death of heroes.

The details of what came to be called the Hungarian uprising or the Hungarian revolution against Soviet rule in 1956—stirred and perhaps sparked by what seemed like spurts of historical truth telling in the Soviet Union and stirrings of unrest in Poland—are complicated, filled with betrayals, broken promises. Its failure was not permanent, but became a triumph delayed but achieved many years

later. Its heroes, like Prime Minister Nagy, who paid with his life in the end, were not forgotten.

To sort out the details of Soviet satellite politics or politburo reasoning of the time is difficult now. It was all so long ago, but some of the contents of that bag of history are still hot to the touch and bitter to the mind. Other things were happening in the world—the Suez Crisis and war occupied not only the Middle East protagonists but also the minds of Western political leaders who were at the same time encouraging Hungarian patriots in the street of Budapest but with little material support. People took to the streets and early on fought Soviet occupying forces and local secret police and triumphed, and established a government, which was overcome by the invasion of 17 divisions of Soviet troops, spearheaded by hundreds of tanks. Not for the last time, the world saw an exodus of refugees from a suffering country, many of them taken in here in the United States.

It was not the politics that stirred the imagination of the world, but the men and women of Hungary and Budapest, 3,000 of whom died in the invasion and the battle for Budapest. In the end, the faceless who were not faceless remained in the memory of the world, and took over the images from that conflict, which would echo time and time again, years later in the Prague spring, and finally, not so long ago in the fall of what was then the Soviet Union and its Communist system. Hungary rose again to be Hungary and the memory of the victims, and the heroes, who were one and the same, are remembered again.



Tonight, we honor the courage of the men and women of the 1956 uprising and revolution, and the spirit in which they finally triumphed. We honor them with the balm of suffering, which is music, and hope that rises out of ashes and blood. We remember the events of 60 years ago, with both joy and pity.