

# CARL LUTZ

## Carl LUTZ, Swiss Vice-Consul in Budapest, 1942-45

As the first Swiss national elevated to the rank of Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem<sup>1</sup> in 1964, Carl Lutz (1895-1975) – aided by his first wife **Gertrud Lutz-Fankhauser** and his helpers – is credited with saving 62,000 Jews from the Nazi Holocaust after the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944.

In January 1942 Swiss Vice-Consul Carl Lutz was stationed in Budapest as the head of the department for the representation of foreign interests of the Swiss Legation; in particular, he looked after the interests of the United Kingdom and the United States.

He is credited with inventing the protective letter (*Schutzbrief*) for Jewish refugees in Budapest. After March 19th 1944, the Germans occupied Hungary and the new government of Sztojay closed the Hungarian borders to Jewish emigration. In tough negotiations with the Nazis and the Hungarian government Lutz got the permission to issue protective letters to 8,000 Hungarian Jews for emigration to Palestine. Using a ruse and interpreting the 8,000 "units" not as persons but as families, he and his staff issued tens of thousands of added "protective letters", about 62,000 altogether. Lutz established 76 Swiss safe houses throughout Budapest and liberated Jews from deportation centers and death marches.

Carl Lutz and his superior, Swiss Minister **Maximilian Jaeger** (see below), had to intervene regularly to ensure that this diplomatic protection was safeguarded and respected. In particular, they had to confront gangs of the Arrow Cross, Hungarian pro-Nazis who tried to seize Jews who had found refuge in these protective houses.

Already in 1942/43, in co-operation with the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Carl Lutz had helped 10,000 Jewish children and young people to emigrate to Palestine.

The center of his rescue activities was in “The Glass House,” located at 29 Vadasz Utca in Budapest. Carl Lutz worked in close co-operation with **Friedrich Born** (see below), the delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, with the Swede, **Raoul Wallenberg** (see links below) as well as with representatives of neutral countries and the Holy See. Late in 1944, when he was no longer able to leave his residence in Buda on account of the advancing Red Army, his work in Pest was carried on by **Peter Zürcher** (see below) until the Soviet victory.

By the war's end close to 124,000 Hungarian Jews survived. Nearly half of these owed their life to the courageous actions of Carl Lutz. But after the Second World War the merits of Lutz sank into oblivion. He was reprimanded by his superiors for having overstepped his competences. Not until 1957 did the Swiss government give him the honor he deserved. Only in the last few years he came back into the public eye, especially thanks to his stepdaughter Agnes Hirschi who experienced consciously the end of War in Budapest. In 1949, Lutz married her mother, Magda Csányi.

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<sup>1</sup> The Righteous among the Nations award honors the non-Jews who acted according to the most noble principles of humanity, risking their lives to help Jews during the Holocaust. To date, over 19,000 men and women have been recognized as Righteous Among the Nations

Carl Lutz's activities on behalf of the Jews have now also become better known thanks to a book by Theo Tschuy (see before), "*Dangerous Diplomacy: The Story of the Swiss Consul Carl Lutz, Rescuer of 62'00 Hungarian Jews*" (Deutsch: "*Carl Lutz und die Juden von Budapest*", Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1998, 2. Auflage).

Nowadays, close to the Synagogue, at the entrance to the old Budapest ghetto, there can be found a **wall-monument** (built in 1991) in honour of Carl Lutz (at the crossing of Rumbach út and Dob út).

**See the pictures :**

[http://www.eda.admin.ch/budapest\\_emb/e/tool/pict.html](http://www.eda.admin.ch/budapest_emb/e/tool/pict.html)

### **Friedrich BORN, Chief Delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross of Switzerland in Budapest**

Friedrich Born (1903-1963) came to Budapest in May 1944. He was appointed delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to Hungary, where he had for several years represented the Swiss Office for Commercial Expansion. He was the successor of **Jean de Bavier**.

During the period from May 1944 to January 1945, Born issued thousands of Red Cross protective letters to Jews of Budapest. He is credited with retrieving thousands of Jews from deportation camps and death marches in and around Budapest. He provided an additional 4,000 Jews with employment papers, preventing their deportation. He put over 60 Jewish institutions under Red Cross protection and housed over 7,000 Jewish children and orphans.

He worked closely with the other neutral diplomatic legations, and set up dozens of Red Cross protective houses. He is credited with rescuing between 11,000 and 15,000 Jews in Budapest. Like Lutz he received the Righteous Among the Nations award (1987).

### **Maximillian JAEGER, Swiss Minister in Budapest, 1936-44**

In 1936, Jaeger was transferred to Budapest, where Switzerland had set up a legation that same year. As the head of the Swiss mission, he was Carl Lutz's direct superior.

Jaeger played an active role in opposing the deportation of Jews by the Nazi and Arrow Cross officials. In particular, he tried to dissuade the Nazis from deporting Jews to Auschwitz and to make them respect the neutrality of the 76 Swiss protective houses. The activities of Minister Jaeger were instrumental in providing Lutz with the necessary conditions for the rescue of Jews in Budapest. Lutz stated that the Minister always allowed him a good deal of freedom of action, and had total confidence in him.

Since the beginning of the war, Jaeger sent regular reports to the Foreign Ministry in Bern regarding the fate of the Jews in Hungary.

### **Dr. Harald FELLER, Swiss Legation's 2<sup>nd</sup> Secretary in Budapest**

Harald Feller replaced Maximilian Jaeger (after Jaeger was recalled, for two month **Anton Josef Kilchmann** had the responsibility of running the Swiss mission) as head of the Swiss Legation in Budapest in 1944 as *ad interim* Chargé d'Affaires.

From the beginning of his appointment, Feller was tireless in his efforts to support Vice-Consul Carl Lutz and the rescue of Jews under Swiss protection. Feller worked closely with the other neutral legations in constantly pressuring the Horthy and Sztójay puppet governments to end the persecution and deportations of Jews.

Feller protected members of the Swedish Legation, who were targeted by the Arrow Cross, by giving them false Swiss passports and providing shelter. Toward the end of the war, Feller hid dozens of Jews in the basement of his consular residence in Budapest.

In February 1945, the Soviets arrested Feller and sent him to Moscow, along with other Swiss nationals. He was returned to Switzerland in February 1946.

He received the Righteous Among the Nations award in 1999.

### **Dr. Peter ZÜRCHER**

Peter Zürcher (1914-1975) owned a company in Hungary from 1940 on. From 1944 onwards, Carl Lutz employed him in the Department of the foreign interests he was in charge of from 1944 on. The young **Ernst Vonrufs** acted as second to Zürcher. Soon afterwards, Lutz appointed Zürcher (and Vonrufs) his temporary representative in Pest, anticipating the moment when he would no longer be able to leave his residence in Buda due to the fightings.

Two interventions in particular are to Peter Zürcher's credit. He managed to prevent the SS and gangs of Arrow Cross from entering the Pest ghetto and from massacring its approximately 70,000 inhabitants: Later, on January 8, 1945, the Arrow Cross planned to evacuate most of the adult of the Jews who were in the Swiss protective houses within the international ghetto so as to place them in the big ghetto, deport them, or liquidate them. Peter Zürcher was alerted and immediately intervened with Vajna, the Budapest representative of the government of Szálasi, the leader of the Arrow Cross. He denounced the violations of international public law and demanded an immediate and final end to the Arrow Cross's attacks on the protective houses and their inhabitants.

He received the Righteous Among the Nations award in 1998.

**Links :**

- ⇒ <http://www.raoul-wallenberg.org.ar/english/carlutz2.htm> – The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation
- ⇒ [www.raoul-wallenberg.de](http://www.raoul-wallenberg.de)
- ⇒ [http://www.eda.admin.ch/telaviv\\_emb/e/home.html](http://www.eda.admin.ch/telaviv_emb/e/home.html) – Swiss Embassy in Tel Aviv, About Switzerland, Righteous Among the Nations of Swiss Nationality
- ⇒ <http://www.yadvashem.org/> – The Righteous Among the Nations