



THE PICTURES THAT TRAVELLED AND DIVIDED THE WORLD

*Life Magazine's Photos Shot During the 1956 Revolution in Hungary*¹

Part I

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The intensity and emotional affinity with which the Western world followed the Hungarians' struggle for freedom and independence, as well as the consequences of the crushing of the Revolution, and the success with which some 200,000 Hungarian refugees were accepted by Western countries, is clearly due in no small measure to the mass media. Nevertheless, historical research in Hungary – with a few exceptions² – has devoted bafflingly little attention to the importance of the role that photojournalism played in this process. In the Western world, until television became widespread enough to reach the masses, illustrated weekly magazines with circulations running into the hundreds of thousand, or even millions (such as *Life*, *Picture Post*, *Paris Match*, *Epoca* and *Stern*), captivated their readerships with varied visual content and large, often full-page or double-spread, excellent quality black-and-white (and colour) photographs, photo essays and reports. Besides influencing the mentality and tastes of millions of people, they also had a major role in shaping public opinion and society.

Among the various Western illustrated magazines reporting on the events of 1956, the photos published by the American *Life* indisputably became the best known and had the greatest impact worldwide. In this essay, I will explore how the images created during the Revolution by photographers on assignment in Hungary for this weekly magazine achieved worldwide fame, what role they played in shaping the discourse and memories surrounding the Revolution, how they appeared in both Communist and anti-Communist propaganda, and how they were manipulated to suit various political agendas. I will also describe how, and under what circumstances the photographs were taken, what the strategy for their publication was, how they were received and what emotions they provoked.³

THE MAGAZINE

Henry R. Luce (1898–1967), owner of the publishing corporation Time Inc. – which published the news magazine *Time* (1923), the business journal *Fortune* (1930) and *The March of Time* radio (1931) and film (1935) series – decided in the





1930s to found a new weekly magazine in which the emphasis would be on the photographs. His rationale for this was that readers were hungrier for pictures and stories told with photos than for anything else.⁴ With the emergence of small cameras, photography had become an increasingly widespread and popular pastime, and this greatly contributed to the growing interest in photographs and the genre of the photo essay. This was also evidenced by the success of European illustrated magazines (such as *Vu*, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and *Weekly Illustrated*).

The first issue of *Life* was published on 23 November 1936. Over the years this weekly magazine, which carried pictures by the world's best photo reporters, became America's most popular media product and one of the most influential international platforms for photojournalism. It was here that Robert Capa's astounding pictures of the Normandy landings (19 June 1944, pp. 25–31) and Alfred Eisenstaedt's iconic photo *V-J Day Kiss in Times Square* (27 August 1945, p. 27) were published, to name just the best-known examples. Following the end of the Second World War, some of Time Inc.'s media products were published internationally. Besides the international editions of *Time*, in 1946 it launched *Life International*, which was distributed in more than 100 countries; then in 1953 it rolled its first foreign-language publication, *Life en Español*, targeting the large Spanish-speaking market. It was not only the prospect of extra business revenue that motivated Luce, the owner of this media empire, to establish an international presence with his publications. He was also on a mission to promote American values and democracy, and this took on a special importance with the escalation of Cold War hostilities. Despite the anti-Communist orientation of *Life* (and *Time*) magazine, and their sometimes bellicose cold warrior tone (rhetoric), which can also be observed in the coverage of the 1956 Revolution and its aftermath, the journalism was performed objectively and to a high professional standard.

LIFE'S CORRESPONDENTS IN BUDAPEST

The outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution took the entire world by surprise. The country became the centre of attention from one day to the next. Photo reports with a Hungarian angle also generated a lot of interest because this was the first time in years that the journalists, including the photographers and cameramen who arrived en masse in the last days of October – estimated to number around 150 – had an opportunity to enter the country, which was almost hermetically sealed behind the Iron Curtain due to the Cold War, and to report objectively without prior permission from the Hungarian authorities.⁵ “Budapest, as one of *Life*'s correspondents wrote,” pointed out Henry R. Luce, “‘held for the rest of the world the frightful fascination of a locked closet from which are heard muffled thuds and groans’.”⁶ But interest in the events in Hungary – even if they may





have been overshadowed somewhat by the Suez crisis – was also stimulated by the fact that this was the first armed conflict in Europe since the Second World War to result in major casualties and destruction, causing the first cracks to appear in Soviet hegemony.

The mostly Western correspondents and photographers reporting from Hungary faced many unexpected difficulties. They often had to work under dangerous conditions, and even those who had reported on the Second World War were surprised by the ferocity of the street fighting and the extent of destruction. “That war, said one, ‘was organised. Mostly you shot at greater ranges. But in Budapest you never knew who was a friend. Freedom fighters were sickeningly careless with their lives. They died all around. It was too much to watch.’”⁷

The correspondents on the ground were also fully immersed as participants in the Revolution themselves, not only in the physical and emotional sense, but also by virtue of their function. The journalists and the insurgents depended on each other, the former for information, and the latter for the broadcasting of news. They knew full well that they could only achieve their objectives if the Western press reported on the events in as much detail as possible. As one of the rebels put it: “If enough of us get killed, people may notice.”⁸

In the days following the outbreak of the Revolution, *Life* sent a six-strong team, comprised of three reporters and three photographers.⁹ The Bonn and Paris bureaux assigned two talented young journalists who threw themselves into this complex assignment, each taking with him an excellent and capable photographer. John Mulliken left Bonn with *Life*’s experienced photographer Michael Rougier, who had taken several award-winning photos in the Korean War, and Timothy Foote was sent from Paris to back him up, together with the freelancer John Sadovy. Just to make sure, the newsroom also sent *Time*’s Vienna correspondent Edgar Clark, and a staffer from the Magnum photo agency, Erich Lessing.

Based on the journalists’ contemporary and subsequent recollections, as well as on the contact sheets and the published photos, it is possible to reconstruct not only where the three photographers went and what events of the Revolution they photographed, but also the conditions under which the reporters worked and their opinions about what they witnessed. Foote and Sadovy met up with Mulliken and Rougier in Vienna. They all stayed at the Hotel Bristol and planned to travel to Budapest together in Mulliken’s company Ford. On 28 October, Mulliken and Rougier went to reconnoitre at the border, but it was closed so they turned back. Foote and Sadovy, however, recognising the unique historic importance of the events in Hungary, did not want to waste any more time; and so that night they secretly decided to try entering the country on foot.





They left a message for their companions, got into a taxi and had themselves taken to the border. Although only aid consignments and doctors were being let in, and the border would only be opened to journalists the next morning, in the small hours they received permission to pass through at Hegyeshalom. They were picked up by an Austrian doctor heading for Budapest with a valid visa, who had joined a convoy of foreign vehicles on the deserted country road, with his Volkswagen Beetle displaying a red cross and loaded up with medical equipment and medicines.

After arriving in the capital without any major setbacks, Foote and Sadovy crossed Margaret Bridge and approached the Parliament Building. They were shocked by the massive, threatening presence of Soviet tanks lined up on the bridge and quayside:

It is hard to convey the intense and continued sense of the total vulnerability of flesh and bone which the silent presence of those hostile tanks gave us. For the average Hungarian householder – as opposed to the active Freedom Fighters – the experience must have been a little like a week playing rabbit in a boa constrictor's cage.¹⁰

Foote also revealed some interesting details about the circumstances of the photography. It is from him we learn that during his walk around the city Sadovy also took several photos with two old Leica cameras,¹¹ but some of the negatives were destroyed by the Soviets when at "the red-starred headquarters of the Soviet Army" – Foote presumably meant the Soviet city command post in Gorkij (today: Városligeti) Avenue – they were taken into custody. As the reporter described the scene: "The streets were increasingly filled with Russian soldiers, including tiny Mongol tank drivers in black hats who looked like men from Mars."¹² When they noticed that Sadovy was covertly taking photographs with his camera held at the hip, the bawling Russians encircled them and pointed machine guns at their stomachs. For a moment they thought they were going to be shot. Everything was thrown out of Foote's bag, the film was torn out of the cameras, and they were herded into the building, where the following exchange took place between a Soviet soldier and the two journalists:

A tall Russian officer with a face like Alexander Nevsky¹³ questioned us: "What are you doing in Hungary?" "Reportage", we replied. "You were taking pictures of tanks", he accused. "No", I said, "my friend was taking pictures in the streets. We didn't know that was forbidden."¹⁴

Following a brief exchange of words concerning the validity of their passports, the Soviets gave everything back and released them.





In the days that followed, the journalists were witnesses to the Soviets' retreat and the triumph of the Revolution; but they were more cautious than the citizens of Budapest in their assessment of the situation. As Foote put it: "Budapest was all but free."¹⁵ On the morning of 30 October, just like the residents of the city, they were also out walking the streets. On József Boulevard and Üllői Road, where the fiercest battles had taken place, they were shocked by the extent of the destruction sustained by the city: "Tramping the streets in the direction of the Kilián Barracks, we could have been inspecting a city ravaged by a major war."¹⁶ The *Life* correspondents, like most other foreign journalists, received help from the rebels (who provided foreign language-speaking guides) to reach the important locations and people, including on 30 October the Revolution's military leader Pál Maléter, who was negotiating at the Kilián Barracks, and the next day Cardinal Mindszenty, who had just been freed from custody.

On 30 October, they also witnessed the tragic events in Köztársaság Square, which had been fuelled by hearsay and a series of misunderstandings. Rumours were spreading like wildfire in the city that agents of the Hungarian State Security Authority (ÁVH) had taken hostages and barricaded themselves inside the Communist Party headquarters building. The photographers from the best-known Western illustrated weekly magazines were among the many foreign correspondents now in Budapest who arrived at the scene. Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini from France's *Paris Match*, who was wounded in the siege and died of his injuries a few days later, Jack Esten from the British *Picture Post* and Mario De Biasi from Italy's *Epoca* also took pictures in the square. Helped by one of the revolutionaries, Foote and Sadovy hurried to the scene as well. When Foote's left hand was injured by a stray bullet at the beginning of the firefight, Sadovy continued working on his own. Sadovy was the only one of *Life* correspondents to watch and document, with his camera, the whole of the firefight lasting several hours, as well as the lynching that followed it.¹⁷

Sadovy (1925–2011), a British national living in France at the time, was not yet very well-known in America.¹⁸ Timothy Foote wanted to work with him at all costs, because he judged him to be the most capable of carrying out this complicated assignment. There were several arguments in his favour. He had been born in Czechoslovakia and fled his homeland because of the Nazis in 1939. He escaped through Hungary to Yugoslavia, and then travelled to Cairo on a fishing boat. During the Second World War he had gained a wealth of experience as a war photographer in the ranks of the British Army on the Italian front. Here he had learned that "the only way to get good pictures ... was to stay ahead of the infantry".¹⁹ To understand how the events in Hungary resonated with him, and how he was capable of capturing their essence with his camera, it is worth quoting Sadovy's own words:





By 1945, [...] resistance, revolt and fighting was all that I could remember. My entire youth had been spent in this. It was the only world I knew. Like all of my generation in that part of Europe, I learned one thing that will never leave me: You can only take so much, and that's enough and you'll fight at any odds.²⁰

After his demobilisation, he mainly worked as a freelance photographer: his photos appeared in *Picture Post* and *Life*, among others. Another, far from irrelevant consideration was that unlike *Life*'s staff photographers, he was multilingual. Besides Czech, Polish and English, he also spoke German and understood a little Russian. Foote had worked with the photographer in 1955 in Morocco, on an assignment for *Life*. It had become clear to him back then that Sadovy kept his cool even in the most dangerous situations; and he took outstanding photos. Foote described his colleague thus: "He was matchless on news, a mild man, also fearless and totally without pretensions. He had a Leica with wide lens. He would get up close to things and quietly pull it out of his pocket."²¹ In Budapest, with his photographs taken in Köztársaság Square, Sadovy again proved his fearlessness and professionalism, which brought him recognition and fame in a stroke. But the photographer did not only make history with his pictures; he also set out in writing what he had seen and experienced in the square. Because of Foote's accident, it was his report, based on his personal experiences, that was published by *Life* magazine. His article is regarded as one of the most shocking and authentic witness accounts of the events in Köztársaság Square.

Sadovy gave a spine-chillingly expressive account of what it was like to find cover in the hail of bullets in the middle of the square, while "people were dropping like flies", crawling on his stomach alongside a tank to photograph the firefight from as close as possible, and "feeling the heat of its gun going off" as it fired at the headquarters building.²² As his memoirs also reveal, the situation was pretty chaotic, you could not tell where the shots were coming from, who was friend and who was foe. After the siege, Sadovy also witnessed how the enraged partisans wreaked revenge on the persons, believed to be ÁVH agents,²³ who came out to the square to give themselves up. In fact, those in the building included security personnel, conscripted soldiers, party functionaries, women and children.

With naturalistic detail, with no attempt to hide his own shock, he reported on the various instances of summary justice that presented such a shocking and disturbing sight, and which he also documented with his camera. These included the group execution featured in his most famous series of pictures:

Six young officers came out, one very good-looking. Their shoulder boards were torn off. Quick argument. We're not so bad as you think we are, give





Picture 1. John Sadovy (left of centre) in a scarf, running with camera in hand in front of the Party Headquarters in Köztársaság Square. Photograph by Mario De Biasi.

us a chance, they were saying. I was three feet from that group. Suddenly one began to fold. They must have been real close to his ribs when they fired. They all went down like corn that had been cut. Very gracefully. And when they were on the ground the rebels were still loading lead into them. They were all officers in that building. Another came out, running. He saw his friends dead, turned, headed into the crowd. The rebels dragged him out. I had time to take one picture of him and he was down.

Then my nerves went. Tears started to come down my cheeks. I had spent three years in the war, but nothing I saw then could compare with the horror of this.

I could see the impact of bullets on a man's clothes. You could see every bullet. There was not much noise. They were shooting so close that the man's body acted as a silencer. This went on for 40 minutes.²⁴

From the beginning until the end of the siege, Sadovy focused every nerve in his body on this physically and emotionally taxing assignment carried out under extremely hazardous conditions, taking photographs without stopping. When he finished the work and put down his camera, however, he was hit by the symptoms of all that tension and stress: "I sat down on a tree trunk. My knees were beginning to give in, as if I was carrying a weight I couldn't carry any more."²⁵





Before returning to Vienna, the correspondents looked on from the Hotel Duna as rebels toppled the Soviet military statue in front of the Statue of Liberty on Gellért Hill, on the opposite bank of the river. Sadovy also took a few frames of this scene from afar. Watching from the hotel, they also witnessed the Soviet tanks rumbling along the quayside as they withdrew from the city. In the light of what they had seen, *Life's* correspondents returned home optimistic, not suspecting that the Soviets would return a few days later to crush the Revolution. During his short stay in Hungary, and then in Austria covering the refugees, Sadovy shot 18 reels of film, taking more than 600 photographs.²⁶

Mulliken and Rougier arrived in Budapest on 29 October, hours after Foote and Sadovy. Lessing also came by car, and Clark was accompanied by his wife, who was a reporter for the International News Service. The journalists stayed at Hotel Duna, which served as a base for the foreign press, and it was here that they met up with their companions. The photos show that Mulliken and Rougier mainly went to different locations than Foote and Sadovy. Lessing, however, photographed several scenes (rebels, street details) that were also documented by Rougier and Sadovy.²⁷ According to Mulliken's recollections their car, which was draped with a US flag, was greeted with euphoria by the Hungarians; but the Soviets treated them with hostility, pointing weapons at them on several occasions. Once, they found themselves in the middle of a firefight between the rebels and the Soviets. A short Soviet tank driver noticed their car and approached them with a pistol in his hand. They had no choice but to leave the scene, abandoning their car with all of Rougier's camera gear in the luggage compartment. At night, with the help of the rebels, Mulliken and Rougier got back their Ford, which had been towed away by the Soviets.²⁸

While Foote, Sadovy, Mulliken and Lessing managed to exit the country without any problems, Rougier and Clark, the last to leave, were twice detained and turned back by the Soviets close to the Austrian border. Together with other foreign nationals intent on leaving, including American diplomats and their family members, they spent two nights in Soviet custody in a school in the town of Mosonmagyaróvár. Finally, on 5 November, they received permission to leave.²⁹ In spite of this not only Lessing, but also Rougier and Clark, soon returned to Hungary.

"DEAD MEN HAVE INDEED DIED IN VAIN IF LIVE MEN REFUSE TO LOOK AT THEM"

As soon as they were back in Paris, Timothy Foote and Sadovy processed and enlarged the photographs in the darkroom.³⁰ It was immediately obvious to Foote that his colleagues had excelled themselves, and Sadovy's pictures enabled





him to file a unique, sensational report to the newsroom, which he sent with the following message: “They’re what all popular revolutions are about: violence, bravery, hatred of oppressors. You’re getting ... a story LIFE was made for.”³¹ The developed pictures arrived in New York by air, to be received by staff of the foreign news department and by the picture editor at the very last moment. This meant that the journalists who had been on the ground in Budapest did not take part in the editorial process.³²

In the *Life* newsroom, from the moment the pictures arrived it was obvious that the Hungarian report would be the lead story of the 12 November issue; this would be at the front of the magazine, taking precedence over the report on the Suez crisis. This was no simple task, however. In America the presidential electoral campaign was well under way, and several important events were taking place around the world at the same time. The magazine’s staff faced a host of other difficulties, too. Just as they were about to go to press, on the night of 3 November, news came that Soviet troops had re-entered Budapest to crush the Revolution. By that time, there was no way of altering the picture report on Hungary, but they did manage to include the facts of the Soviet counterattack and suppression of the Revolution in the text of the report.

A serious dilemma stemmed from the fact that most of the 27 pictures intended for publication – 16 from Sadovy, 3 each from Rougier and Lessing, and 5 from the various news agencies and other photo reporters – showed raw violence, death and destruction. What was more, the shocking scenes in Sadovy’s photos – all but one made in Köztársaság Square – documented not the heroism of the rebels, but the aggression and brutality shown towards the oppressors, the (alleged) members of the secret police, including their summary execution. It was essential to explain the causes and antecedents of these events to the readers. The editors used the article’s headline (“Patriots Strike Ferocious Blows at a Tyranny”),³³ the picture captions (“Dead, the Riddled Enemies of Freedom Lie Huddled in the Street”)³⁴ and the accompanying text to make it clear what had triggered the Hungarians’ aggression.

Above all, however, any accusations of sensationalism had to be dispelled. At the front of the magazine, in a leader printed alongside the table of contents, the reasons for publishing the disturbing and shocking pictures were explained. It was in connection with the publication of photos taken by Robert Capa (and Gerda Taro) in the Spanish Civil War that *Life* had first declared why it believed it had a moral obligation to print not only light-hearted, entertaining pictures, but also dramatic and disturbing war photos showing death and destruction. The magazine referred to this editorial principle on several occasions, including in the introduction to its picture report on the 1956 Revolution:





Picture 2. The 12 November 1956 issue of *Life* with John Sadovy's photos on pages 34–35. Blinken OSA Archives, Gary L. Filerman collection.

Life has been reporting war and peace, depression and prosperity for almost 20 years. We have never shown horror for horror's sake, but as far back as 1938, in a story on the Spanish Civil War, we declared: "Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them." This week, again, is a time for looking at dead men – heroes and villains.³⁵

Four pictures from Sadovy's iconic, most shocking and, due to its multiple republications, best-known series of photos were printed on the opening double-page spread of the ten-page picture report on the Hungarian Revolution.³⁶ The pictures document the split-second phases of the surrender by the young defenders of the party headquarters, and their summary execution, similarly to a series of freeze-frames from a motion picture. The series of images is impressive in several respects. Sadovy captured the reactions of the soldiers grouped in front of the wall of the building, and the shots fired at them, from up close, almost at arms length, cheek by jowl with the barrels of the firing weapons. This is evidenced not only by the photographer's recollections, but by the gun barrels and body parts

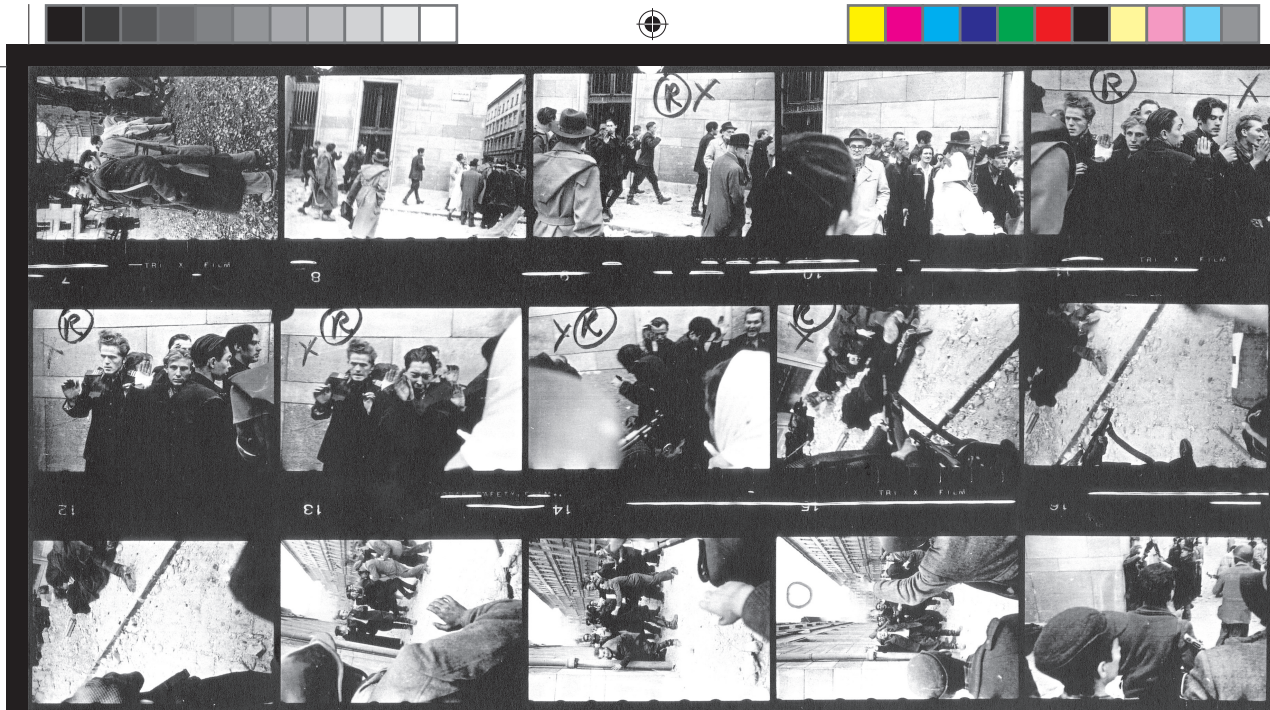




protruding into the shot. Originally all four shots had protruding details, but not all these are visible due to the cropping of the pictures.

The images show the casualties, while those who stood in front of them and fired, or just watched, are not visible save for these extremities. Seeing the composition of the first frame, the magazine's readers might have felt they were looking at an artistically composed and carefully staged group scene. However, the succession of sharp and blurry frames that followed, full of tension, left no doubt in their minds that the photographer had documented a real execution. The four photos printed in the magazine were not the same size (the first and the last two pictures were much smaller than the others), and to ensure ideal composition and make use of the available space they were all cropped (Picture 2). On the first, sharpest image of the building's defenders standing in front of each other by the wall with their hands raised in surrender, instead of the original six there are only five soldiers; and some of these are obscured. Two soldiers are facing the camera while the third, at the front of the group, is turned to one side. In the centre of the picture, the focus is on the light-haired boy with a bandaged hand, who glares at Sadovy and his camera with apparent calm. Then the viewer's gaze shifts towards the face of the man on the left-hand edge of the shot, who is already showing alarm at the crowd's reaction. The small picture was positioned in the upper left-hand corner of the double-page spread in the weekly magazine, with the headline and body text running across both pages in columns the same width as the photo. The editors clearly intended the second picture in the series to have the most impact, and they emphasised this by reproducing it in the largest size. This photo, which takes up almost two thirds of the left side, also spills over onto the right-hand side of the double page. In the motion-blurred image, readers witness the soldiers' desperate moment of instinctive self-defence. The reader's gaze is drawn inexorably to the fear of death reflected in the expressions of the tall man on the left, and the other victim, who was only seen in profile in the previous shot, but now faces the camera. The photographer managed to record the twisted expression of terror (or pain) on the face of the dark-haired soldier instinctively holding his hands up in self-defence, in the fraction of a second when the first salvo of shots must have rung out. In the most dramatic frame of the series of pictures of the execution, the focus is clearly on the expressions of the two victims. This image is followed by the last two, small and blurry images showing the movements of the soldiers collapsing, and then the sight of bodies on the ground, all but one motionless and apparently lifeless. In these two pictures, positioned one above the other, the lethal weapons and details of people participating actively and passively in the execution are clearly visible. Sadovy's camera is focused on the heads of a man passing by in a crouching position and a woman wearing a headscarf, as well as the arm and rifle of a man who is presumably one of the shooters. Consequently, the bodies of the soldiers behind them, who have collapsed to the ground in a heap, are out of focus.





Picture 3. Contact sheet of John Sadovy's pictures taken in Köztársaság Square. Frames 7–10 were published in the 12 November 1956 issue of *Life*. Part of a private collection.

Sadovy himself also believed that one of these pictures, on its own, would not be able to tell the story it was documenting. This was only possible by publishing the series, thus allowing the dramatic events to unfold with maximum impact, making it possible to believe that the soldiers were really shot. The contact sheets (Picture 3) clearly show that Sadovy shot ten frames from when the soldiers left the building until the moments after they were shot, when their seemingly lifeless bodies lying on the ground are visible from various angles. Sadovy would probably have been fully satisfied if more shots from the series had been published. *Life's* publications usually published three or four of the frames, but other publications often only carried one or two photos. Only a few seconds were available in which to commit the events to film. "Sadovy had his Leica with 35 mm lens pre-set for 4 to 15 ft and 250th of a second at f11. Within 8 to 10 seconds, photographing on reflex without thinking about composition at all, he had taken the four pictures on this spread."³⁷ He was completely focused on taking photographs, clicking the shutter almost instinctively, remaining emotionally detached from what he was seeing. Under these circumstances, only a fraction of the observed events registered in his consciousness, which is why he later remembered far fewer details than he had witnessed and recorded with his Leica:

"I remember [...] how they fell, how I even saw their clothing bursting when the bullets hit them, and how I thought, 'They are going down the way you'd cut corn. They are folding up smoothly, in slow motion.' But when



I saw the photographs later, I was astonished at how much more they revealed than what I had seen. During the action I actually saw very little of the detail, the agonized expressions of the men being shot”³⁸ – Sadovy later told *Life*’s legendary photo reporter Carl Mydans.

After what had occurred, and seeing the photographs, it never occurred to Sadovy or the staff of *Life* that any of the victims lying on the ground might have survived the volley of bullets. They were convinced that everyone had died, which was also reflected in the picture captions.³⁹ This further heightened the drama of the image and proved its authenticity. When, months later, newspapers in Hungary reported that two of the young men had miraculously survived, with the Soviet and satellite Communist press also publishing accounts of this, *Life* carried a short piece too, accompanied by photographs, under the headline *Two ‘Dead’ Reds Live to Tell It. Shot Down by Patriots, Security Police Are Found Convalescing in Hungary* (Picture 4).⁴⁰ The first two frames of Sadovy’s memorable series of images were republished, this time in their original versions.

On the left and right edges of both group photos the two surviving victims, Lajos Berta-Somogyi and József K. Farkas are visible. The new photographs of the survivors, taken in Hungary, were also printed. They showed a small portrait of K. Farkas, and a full-figure photograph of Berta-Somogyi, who can be clearly made out in most of the pictures in Sadovy’s series. In the picture he is seen on crutches, both his legs having been seriously injured after the incident, and one foot had to be amputated. K. Farkas’s recollections, which were also quoted by *Life*, reveal what a horrifying experience the execution was for the victims, and what serious injuries they suffered. One of them played dead, and around a quarter of an hour later somebody went over to see whether they were alive. The magazine illustrated this with one of Sadovy’s previously unpublished photographs. The cropped picture shows a nurse on first-aid duty bending down and touching Berta-Somogyi. It is important to note that *Life* continued referring to the two survivors as secret policemen, although it was clear from the reports that those concerned were conscripts performing their national service at the State Security Authority.



A bomber stuck in New Orleans. Not a thing in his hand but air. Wrote home in a flash. Telegram me some cash! — but one he's landed for haul!

TELEGRAPHIC MONEY ORDERS

DRINK... Bubble UP

Deliciously lighter! A KISS OF LEMON. A KISS OF LIME.

BUBBLE UP CORPORATION 101 E. Washington St. Seattle, Wash.

100

SEQUEL



"LIFE" SHOWED SOMOGYI (LEFT, BOTH PICTURED) AND FARKAS (FAR RIGHT, BOTH PICTURED) IN RAIN OF BULLETS

TWO 'DEAD' REDS LIVE TO TELL IT

Shot down by patriots, security police are found convalescing in Hungary

At the height of the Budapest spring, patriots pulled members of the hard Hungarian security police from a Communist building and, as shown in the memorable *Life* picture above, riddled them point-blank with bullets. Then 45 security police were left for dead.

But some of the security policemen have miraculously lived. Two of them, Lajos Somogyi and József Farkas, have appeared in both the Soviet and satellite press. Somogyi (right, in his sister bullets, had a leg amputated, and from a Budapest hospital Farkas (left), who was also badly wounded in the leg, gave Communists a vivid account of what happened to him on the bloody day.

The rebels ordered his group out of the Communist party building. Farkas said, and he heard clicking gun bolts. "Someone shouted, 'Don't shoot, these are our prisoners.' But my companions were dropping like flies. ... Someone fired point-blank from about half a yard away. I fell to my face and felt the hot squirt of blood. Around me I heard a lot of shouting, screaming, moaning and crying. I played dead. About 15 minutes later some hands reached for me." They were the hands of first-aid workers (below) who started both Farkas and Somogyi on an incredible recovery.



EXAMINING BODIES after shooting, a first-aid worker touches Somogyi. Farkas (far above on right).

ALIVE BUT CRIPPLED, Somogyi, the former security policeman, lurches down a street on crutches and in civilian clothes.

Picture 4. The 18 March 1957 issue of *Life*, with the pictures of John Sadovy and Hungarian news agency MTI on page 120. *Blinken OSA Archives, Gary L. Filerman collection.*





The photographs published on the next four pages of the 12 November issue of *Life* showed symbolic scenes from the Revolution: the rebels, a small picture of Prime Minister Imre Nagy, and atrocities committed by the organs of the dictatorship, namely the “Soviets and the Hungarian secret police”, as well as pictures of the struggle against them, the street fighting, the destruction, the Hungarian victims and the mourners. In addition to the images made by its own photographers, *Life* also carried photographs by others. On the last four pages of the picture report, however, Sadovy once again took centre stage with a written description of the events in Köztársaság Square, with pictures. The photographer’s own account of what happened, and some of his pictures taken during and after the siege were printed here. Most of the photos documented the acts of violence against people coming out of the party headquarters, more executions and details of the beating of a woman employed by the party (Anna Kelemen).

The report culminated in a full-page display of one of Sadovy’s pictures, revealing a terrible spectacle. The picture shows an enraged woman, spitting on the dead body of a victim with his bloody chest bared, who has been strung up from a tree by his feet. In the background a small crowd has gathered, watching with a mixture of indifference and curiosity while the scene is recorded by a man in a hat who is standing opposite Sadovy. In the last sentence of the picture caption, the editors spelt out what had triggered the woman’s reaction: “Viewing former tormentors’ corpses, the Hungarian said, ‘They shot our children.’”⁴¹ They had in mind two tragic episodes of the Revolution in particular, the shooting of unarmed crowds in front of the Parliament Building, and another similar incident in the town of Mosonmagyaróvár, in which over a hundred civilians lost their lives or were wounded. Members of the State Security Authority also took part in these mass homicides. To make this fact clear to the readers of the American weekly magazine they also reproduced prominently, in the middle of the picture report, a shocking photo taken after the tragedy in Mosonmagyaróvár by Rolf Gillhausen, the photographer for the German magazine *Stern*, summarising what had happened in the picture caption. In the upper third of the shot, mourning family members can be seen standing around the victims lined up on the ground before the funeral. The reader’s gaze is drawn to the lifeless mass of young bodies with missing items of clothing, photographed from a low angle, filling a substantial portion of the shot.⁴²

In Sadovy’s picture, the face of the woman spitting on the corpse may be a little blurred, but it was nevertheless recognisable. With this photo and others, the editors were faced with the considerable dilemma of whether publishing the pictures would endanger people who were identifiable and had remained in Hungary.⁴³ This was also the case for certain pictures by Lessing and Rougier. In





Köztársaság Square, Lessing took a shot of a rebel with a wooden leg wearing a hat (János Mész). Making it even more incriminating, the picture caption below the “one-legged hero” notes that he took part in the siege of the party headquarters. (“One-legged hero, rebel in a felt hat and army dress, joined the charge against police headquarters.”).⁴⁴ The situation was more complicated when it came to Rougier’s photograph of an innocent-faced child looking exhausted and lost, taken from up close, as not only his age but also his name (“Pal Pruck”) was given in the picture caption, making the boy’s subsequent identification much easier.⁴⁵ But several people were also recognisable in the photos documenting the lynching. Although several people in the newsroom argued that certain pictures should not be published, or should have the faces blurred out or covered to protect the identities of those concerned, Edward Thompson did not give in to the pressure, refusing to allow the manipulation of the photos.

The copy for the issue concerned was sent to the press on 4 November, and the photographs a few days later. Back then, producing (preparing the content, editing, design, printing, binding) and distributing high quality issues of the magazine, which contained on average close to 200 photographs, took at least ten to twelve days, especially if foreign picture reports were also included.⁴⁶

Nobody was in any doubt that the photographs of the Hungarian Revolution were of unique historical and photographic importance and would be among the most memorable pieces of photojournalism ever. And the magazine certainly did everything to make sure that the pictures became as widely known as possible. A few of the shots by Sadovy and Rougier were made public before the 12 November issue came out. The photos were handed over to the US news agency Associated Press. The images, which were transmitted by phototelegraph, were published in numerous American daily newspapers on 8 and 10 November, ensuring they were seen – albeit printed in small size and low quality – by several million people.⁴⁷ Some of the photos were also published in Europe. In the 18-page picture report on the Hungarian Revolution in its 10 November issue, along with pictures by photographers including Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini, Franz Goëss, Russ Melcher and Dominique Beretty, the popular French magazine *Paris Match* published a double-page spread featuring the four frames from Sadovy’s series of photos that would be shown in *Life* two days later. What is more, the French magazine published the photos in their original versions (uncropped), and printed all four in the same size, only cutting a few millimetres off the last two frames. *Paris Match*, as we will discover in the second part of this essay, had an important intermediary role in the publicisation of the photos.⁴⁸

Translation by Daniel Nashaat





¹ This essay was originally published in Hungarian. See: Farkas, Judit Antonia (2018), “A képek, amelyek bejárták és megosztották az egész világot. A *Life* magazin 1956-os fotói.” [The Pictures That Travelled and Divided the World. *Life* Magazine’s Photos Shot During the 1956 Revolution in Hungary] *Korall* 19/73: 171–201. The longer version of the article with the complete and detailed bibliography can be found on *Hungarian Review*’s website.

² Notable examples include the book by Phil Casoar and Eszter Balázs entitled *Les Héros de Budapest* (Paris, Les Arènes, 2006), an expanded edition of which was also published in Hungarian (Casoar–Balázs 2016).

³ Thanks are due to the legal successors of John Sadovy and Mario De Biasi for consenting to the use of the photographs.

⁴ For *Life* magazine see Baughman 2001; Doss 2001; Brinkley 2010; Webb 2016.

⁵ “Last Man”. In: *Time*, 3 December 1956, 72; Molnár [2006] Note 1.

⁶ Luce, Henry R.: “Forward”. In: MacLeish–Foote [1956] 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ I have summarised the story of the *Life* journalists’ trip to Hungary and the publication of their photo report on the basis of the following sources: Sadovy, John: “People were dropping like flies”. *Life*, 12 November 1956, 40–41; Foote, Timothy: “Their first taste of victory”. In: MacLeish–Foote [1956]: 49; Foote, Timothy: “The Road Back to Budapest”. *The New York Times Magazine*, 20 November 1966, 56–57, 144–153; Elson 1973: 399; Wainwright 1986: 226–250; Lessing 2006; Letter from Timothy Foote to Yvonne Sadovy (2002) and John Sadovy (2005). In: Ford 2016: 9–11.

¹⁰ Foote, Timothy: “The Road Back to Budapest”. *The New York Times Magazine*, 20 November 1966, 146. Cf. Id: “Their First Taste of Victory”. In: MacLeish–Foote [1956]: 49.

¹¹ Portrait of Death. *Time*, 19 November 1956, 72.

¹² Foote, Timothy: “The Road Back to Budapest”. *The New York Times Magazine*, 20 November 1966, 146.

¹³ Foote was presumably referring to the lead character in Eisenstein’s film of the same title (1938).

¹⁴ Foote, Timothy: “The Road Back to Budapest”. *The New York Times Magazine*, 20 November 1966, 148.

¹⁵ Ibid, 149.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 56–57. *Life*’s other photographer, Erich Lessing (1923–2018), also arrived at the scene. He mainly photographed the aftermath of the siege and the lynching, the bodies lying on the ground, and the rebels and crowd in the square and nearby. Lessing 2006: 18; *Budapest 1956*. 2006: 142–150, 152.

¹⁸ For Sadovy see: “Portrait of Death”. *Time*, 19 November 1956, 72; Mydans–Mydans 1968: 187–188; Wainwright 1986: 227, 230–231; Casoar–Balázs 2016: 224–234; Ford 2016. Cf. Poggi 2015: 197–200.

¹⁹ Mydans–Mydans 1968: 188.

²⁰ Sadovy quoted by Mydans–Mydans. Ibid.

²¹ Wainwright 1986: 227.

²² Sadovy, John: “People were dropping like flies”. *Life*, 12 November 1956, 40.

²³ Security personnel, conscripted soldiers, party functionaries, women and children were also in the building.

²⁴ Sadovy, John: “People were dropping like flies”. *Life*, 12 November 1956, 41.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Portrait of Death 1956”. *Time*, 19 November 1956, 72; Foote, Timothy: “Their First Taste of Victory”. In: Foote–MacLeish [1956]: 49, 68–69; MacLeish–Foote [1956]: 68–69; Foote, Timothy: “The Road Back to Budapest”. *The New York Times Magazine*, 20 November 1966, 151.





²⁷ A notable example of this is that both Rougier and Lessing snapped Pál Pruck as he wandered alone around the Corvin Alley area. Besides them, the British freelance reporter David Hurn and a German photographer also took pictures of the boy. *The Observer*, 11 November 1956, 7; *Life*, 12 November 1956, 36; *Budapest 1956*. 2006: 172; Casoar 2016.

²⁸ Wainwright 1986: 228–230.

²⁹ “US Staff Convoy in Vienna at Last”. *The New York Times*, 6 November 1956, 27; “A Big Story ‘Life’ is Made for”. *Life*, 12 November 1956, 2; Elson 1973: 399; Wainwright 1986: 229–230.

³⁰ On the edition of the photo report in details: Wainwright 1986: 226–227, 231–250.

³¹ “A Big Story ‘Life’ is Made for”. *Life*, 12 November 1956, 2.

³² Timothy Foote shortly travelled to New York, and he was present during the editing of the special edition. Letter by Timothy Foote to Yvonne Sadovy (2002). In: Ford 2016: 8.

³³ *Life*, 12 November 1956, 34–43.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 35.

³⁵ “A Big Story ‘Life’ is Made for”. *Life*, 12 November 1956, 2. Cf. “The World’s Two Wars: Teruel Falls and Tsingtao Burns”. *Life*, 24 January 1938, 9.

³⁶ *Life*, 12 November 1956, 34–35. Page size: 26 x 36 cm. Sizes of photographs: 13 x 8.3 cm / 36 x 26.2 cm / 13 x 11 cm / 13 x 11 cm. Cf. Poggi 2015: 200. Cf. Poggi 2015: 200.

³⁷ Evans 1997: 113.

³⁸ Mydans, Carl: “With Mind and Heart and a Magic Box”. *Life*, 23 December 1966, 70.

³⁹ See endnote 42.

⁴⁰ Sequel. “Two ‘Dead’ Reds Live to Tell It. Shot down by Patriots, Security Police are Found Convalescing in Hungary”. *Life*, 18 March 1957, 120. In fact, only one of the six soldiers had died. At that time, however, only two survivors were written about.

⁴¹ *Life*, 12 November 1956, 43.

⁴² *Ibid*, 38–39.

⁴³ For more on this see: Wainwright 1986: 245–246.

⁴⁴ *Life*, 12 November 1956, 37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 36. Picture caption: “On a man’s mission, Pal Pruck, 15, was one of the many brave teenagers who fought in the rebellion. He is standing in a rubble-strewn Budapest street.”

⁴⁶ Wainwright 1986: 247–248.

⁴⁷ As far as I know, Sadovy’s iconic series of four frames was not among them. “Portrait of Death”. *Time*, 19 November 1956, 72. One of the biggest US daily broadsheets also printed one picture by each of the two photographers: “National Uprising in Budapest: Violent Justice, Feeble Weapons”. *The New York Times*, 9 November 1956, 12.

⁴⁸ “Les Héros de Budapest”. *Paris Match*, 10 November 1956, 40–41.

