

El Salvador's Holocaust Heroes

By John Lamperti¹

It must be clearly established that San Salvador [sic] is the only state to overcome any hesitancy and to undertake an active rescue operation.

Carl Lutz, Swiss Ambassador in Budapest, 1944²



Germany invaded its wavering ally Hungary on March 19, 1944, when eleven German divisions marched into Budapest. There was no resistance, and a compliant puppet government was installed in a few days. The “final solution” for Hungarian Jews then began with shocking speed. In a few weeks yellow stars and ghettos were imposed everywhere that Jews lived in Hungary outside the capital. Deportations to Auschwitz began in mid May, and in less than a fortnight from 12,000 to 14,000 Jewish people *per day* were being sent away on special trains, packed horribly into freight and cattle cars. In less than two months, 445,000 human beings had been shipped to their deaths.³

George Mandel/Mantello

Suddenly the transports stopped. Hungary’s strong man Miclós Horthy, who had raised few previous objections to Hitler’s plans, ordered a halt to the deportations while more than 200,000 Jews in Budapest remained largely unmolested. To many that halt seemed no less than a miracle. But what made Horthy act?

The answer, surprisingly, has much to do with the small, far-off nation of El Salvador and with a man named George Mantello. Most Salvadorans have never heard his name, although he was an official of their government during the critical years of the second World War. Mantello was an unusual Salvadoran who spoke no Spanish and never set his foot on the nation's soil. He fought for his adopted country and for humanity against one of the greatest evils of our time, and his weapons were not guns or bombs but words, dedication and truth. Mantello did not work alone; among others, Col. José Arturo Castellanos, a career army officer and Salvadoran diplomat, was an essential partner and enabler in the nation's magnificent effort. The victory these men helped to win was saving tens of thousands of human beings from death in the Holocaust.

How could El Salvador play any role with the Holocaust? Both geography and politics appear to contradict the very idea. It is a small country with no direct access to the Atlantic, and it had little to do with Europe except for selling there some of its exports, especially coffee. El Salvador remained neutral during World War I while it's Central American neighbors

nominally joined the Allied side. In addition to its remoteness, from 1932 to 1944 the nation was ruled by a military president/dictator, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, with clear Fascist sympathies. Historian Patricia Parkman, who described in detail the last years of the Martínez regime, wrote:

...Martínez, probably motivated both by a nationalist desire to escape North American domination and by his own authoritarian political philosophy, for some years maintained cordial relations with the Axis powers. El Salvador recognized the Japanese puppet state of Manchuko and was among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the Franco regime in Spain. During the 1930s Martínez turned to Germany and Italy for arms and sent Salvadoran officers to those countries for training. El Salvador's purchases from Germany increased between 1931 and 1939 to about one-third of its total imports...⁴

Despite all that, Martínez could read handwriting on the wall and see that the influence of the nearby United States could not be denied; for one thing, with war under way in Europe his country's trade there was all but ended and its coffee would have to be sold in North America. El Salvador declared war on the Axis in December 1941, shortly after Pearl Harbor. It took no part in actual fighting, and President Martínez resisted the U.S. desire to station 3000 troops there to guard the coast. Even so, as an ally El Salvador received some lend-lease arms. These played no role against the Germans or Japanese but were later used in internal conflicts, and some of them finally served in a foreign war when El Salvador briefly fought neighboring Honduras in 1969.



José Arturo Castellanos

The nation's magnificent role in the European holocaust was not initiated by the government in San Salvador, which remained concerned with problems much closer to home. El Salvador's efforts and success were largely due to two men, and José Arturo Castellanos and George Mandel/Mantello should be remembered. The story of their struggle and triumph has been told in detail by American historian David Kranzler in a book with the dramatic title *The Man Who Stopped the Trains to Auschwitz*. Incredible as it seems, that title is literally correct. More recently the documentary film "Glass House" features interviews with children of both men and brings their stories up to the present time.

George Mandel/Mantello was an unlikely choice for a Salvadoran hero. He was born in 1901 in Transylvania, a land far removed from El Salvador by distance, language and culture. His parents were Orthodox Jews, although not strongly religious, and his name at birth was not George Mantello or even Mandel but Gyorgy Mandl. In his twenties George Mandel already proved himself to be a brilliant businessman and banker; he was also an active Zionist. In

1928 he married Iréne Berger, and their only child, a son, was born in 1930.⁵ As noted he did not speak Spanish, and apparently neither before nor after the war did he ever visit the small, distant country of which he became a citizen and an official, and to which he helped bring great honor.⁶

Arturo Castellanos, in contrast to Mandel/Montello, was a "real" (native) Salvadoran. Born in San Vicente in December 1893, he attended the Salvadoran military academy from 1910 to 1913 and graduated as a second lieutenant. On December 8, 1931, Castellanos, then a lieutenant colonel, was appointed commander of the First Artillery Regiment in San Salvador. It was a moment of crisis in Salvadoran history.

El Salvador suffered a holocaust of its own in the first months of 1932. On December 2, 1931 a military coup had overthrown elected president Arturo Araujo and installed General Hernández Martínez to begin what would be twelve-plus years in power; it therefore was Martínez who appointed Col. Castellanos to his artillery command. In January a large scale rebellion broke out, impelled by the miserable depression-era conditions of life for peasants and workers. The revolt was quickly defeated by the government army, and there ensued a frightful period of mass killing known as the *Matanza* (slaughter) when thousands of people, most of whom had no part in the uprising, were murdered by troops and civilian militias. Most of the victims were *campesinos* living in the Western half of the country, especially those of indigenous culture or appearance.⁷ It is not clear that the First Artillery had any direct part in these events, but there can be no doubt that Arturo Castellanos, like all Salvadorans of the time, was deeply affected. If and how experiencing the *Matanza* in his own country influenced his later actions as a rescuer is a fascinating unanswered question.

One year later Col. Castellanos was sent for advanced study to the military institute in Turin Italy. He reached the rank of colonel in 1935, and served briefly in San Salvador as the second ranking officer on the army's General Staff in 1936. Nevertheless he soon found himself back in Europe where he remained until the end of the war, originally as an army business agent but later as a diplomat. His first task, which took him to Czechoslovakia, was arranging the purchase of weapons and supplies for the Salvadoran armed forces. This job brought him into contact with George Mandel.

The connection, and soon friendship, between these two men began when Mandel was able to help the colonel with his purchasing assignment. That completed, Castellanos did not return home but was appointed Consul General in Liverpool, England. It was not unusual for military officers to serve as diplomats, but in this case several people, including his daughter Frieda and the former British minister in San Salvador,⁸ believe President Martínez was motivated in part by wanting to keep a possible political rival at arms length. In 1938 Col. Castellanos became El Salvador's Consul General in Hamburg, Germany, where the campaign against Jews was well underway. In both England and Germany, Castellanos issued a small number of visas to Jews who wanted to escape Nazi persecution. He received orders from the Salvadoran government to severely limit this activity, but issued several more in spite of the negative attitude of his superiors.

Finally in late 1941 Castellanos was transferred to Zurich, where he became El Salvador's Consul General for Switzerland; the office soon moved to Geneva. After December 7 his country declared war on Germany and its diplomatic posts there were closed. Once the Geneva office was

established, Castellanos renewed contact with George Mandel/Mantello now living in Switzerland, and offered him the new post of First Secretary in the Salvadoran Consulate. This move turned out to be a life saver for tens of thousands of potential Nazi victims.

In 1939 Castellanos had appointed Mandel to be El Salvador's honorary consul for Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The position provided him a Salvadoran diplomatic passport, a valuable asset in those pre-war years. Around this time George Mandel changed his name, presumably considering Mantello more suitable for a Latin American official.

In 1941, seeing trouble fast approaching, Mandel/Mantello decided to liquidate his business holdings in Eastern Europe and relocate in Switzerland. However, El Salvador's declaration of war against the Axis in December found him still in Romania and now the representative of an enemy power. As a diplomat he should have been able to return directly "home" to Switzerland, El Salvador's diplomatic headquarters for Europe, but due apparently to an identity mix-up he was detained illegally in Zagreb where he spent months under "hotel arrest." Finally he escaped back to Bucharest disguised as the co-pilot of a small military aircraft. From there he traveled by train to Switzerland, using the false identity of a Romanian officer and in constant fear of being discovered. Safe at last, in August Mandel/Mantello accepted the offer by Castellanos to serve as first secretary for the Salvadoran consulate in Geneva, a job created for the occasion. He would hold that position throughout the war years, and from that consulate El Salvador's extraordinary rescue efforts were launched.

Mantello had been in Vienna in 1938 when the Germans took over Austria, and in 1939 he observed the Nazi occupation of Prague. He was a man of foresight as his successful business ventures testified, and now he saw that a historical catastrophe was approaching for the Jewish people of Europe. Facing a disaster of such magnitude, it might have been easy to give way to despair and apathy, to simply live out the war in the comfortable sanctuary of Switzerland. After all, what could one person do? Fortunately George Mantello did not despair, and it turned out that one person could do a great deal. By the war's end, Mantello had been instrumental in saving over 100,000 lives. Of course he did not do that alone – but much of it would not have happened without him.

Switzerland, and especially Geneva, was a central location for information and action regarding Europe's Jews, and a multitude of government agencies of many nations as well as NGOs operated there. Unfortunately, doctrinal differences and personal antagonisms sometimes kept them from cooperating to carry out their mandates to help. One of George Mantello's early efforts fell victim to such infighting. He conceived a plan for a trust company that would allow Jews in Nazi-occupied countries to save their financial assets for themselves or their heirs after the war. The project could have saved lives as well as money, but it came to nothing when the heads of the two most important Jewish organizations refused to sit down at the same table to discuss it. Sadly this was not the only instance of such incredible selfishness.

The Swiss government, too, was hostile to rescue projects. For a complex of reasons it offered little aid to Hitler's victims and sometimes actively obstructed those, including Castellanos and Mantello, who engaged in rescue efforts it deemed "illegal." Particularly ugly was the policy of "refoulement" under which thousands of Jews reaching the Swiss border in search of sanctuary were turned back to await their fates at German hands.

Since collective work was frustrated, Mantello found another avenue. For some time, Latin American passports and citizenship papers had been avidly sought by Jews in Poland and elsewhere. They were available in Switzerland from several consulates – at stiff prices. Mantello proposed to his diplomatic superior, Consul Castellanos, that Salvadoran passports or travel documents could be *given* in large numbers to endangered people. Castellanos told Mantello to seek the approval of El Salvador's leading jurist; this was former (and future) World Court president Dr. Gustavo Guerrero, then residing in Switzerland. Guerrero supported the effort, with the change that Salvadoran *citizenship* papers should be given instead of passports. The idea of consulting Dr. Guerrero may have been a substitute for seeking the approval of the Salvadoran government,⁹ approval which might well have been refused since at that time General Martínez was still in control. In any case, this agreement launched the first Salvadoran rescue project.

The operation began in a small way, but expanded rapidly as word spread. In 1943 Mantello opened at his own expense a special office dedicated to this job, and it produced “several thousand” sets of Salvadoran citizenship papers, each covering an entire family. The papers were smuggled to their destinations in a multitude of ways, usually involving diplomatic couriers . It seems surprising that German authorities respected these papers, which created Salvadoran citizens out of European Jews who (like Mantello) had never seen “their” country. But in general they *were* honored; the papers were literally lifesavers. The likely explanation is that numerous German citizens were living in Latin America, and the German government was thinking of their protection. Since few genuine Latin Americans were available in occupied Europe for exchanges, the newly minted “Latins” would have to serve – provided their respective governments recognized their documents. The picture was complicated, and the protection afforded by such Salvadoran citizenship papers varied by country and over time. There were tragedies as well as triumphs, when the protective papers were not respected by some German or satellite officer or arrived too late; the latter, sadly, was the case with George Mantello's own parents and many relatives who were deported from their home in Transylvania and murdered in 1944. Still, thousands of Jews and other threatened people survived the Nazi nightmare thanks to these Salvadoran documents, which Mantello and his collaborators distributed as widely as they could. But the worst, and the best, were yet to come.

Before the war, some 450,000 Jews lived in Hungary.¹⁰ By 1940 that number had increased to about 735,000, since Germany forcibly returned to Hungary territories in Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia that had been taken from it after the First World War. In addition there were thousands of ex-Jews who had converted to Christianity. The total was around 800,000, and about one fourth of them lived in Budapest. Until March 1944 this entire Jewish population survived in relative peace. Their situation was far from normal, and racist laws had been enacted in Hungary as early as 1938. Unlike more democratic Denmark where until September 1943 Jews remained citizens with full rights even under German occupation, in Hungary they were degraded and discriminated against. But the Hungarian Jews had not experienced ghettos or the yellow star, nor had there been mass deportations and murder. Although many of them knew of the horrors suffered by Jews in other parts of occupied Europe, they still believed “It can't happen here.” That illusion was to change abruptly.

Admiral Miklós (Nicholas) Horthy had dominated Hungary's right-wing governments since 1919, and he was a strong ally of Nazi Germany. However, disastrous failures of Hungarian troops

against the Soviet army led Horthy's government to being exploring peace terms with the Allies. This, and traces of nationalist resistance to some of Hitler's demands, brought on the German invasion of March 19. Horthy formally maintained his position as Regent, but the Germans and the SS were in charge. Organizing the mass murder of Hungarian Jews began immediately.

The German murder team was led by Adolf Eichmann, and his SS gang found many Hungarians more than willing to cooperate. The Jewish population was unprepared and many wanted badly to accept the reassurances passed on by the new "Jewish Council" established under German orders. Nevertheless ghettos were established with amazing speed in the Hungarian provinces, and the mass deportations began on May 15. In only two months all of Hungary except for the capital area had been stripped of its Jewish population, over 400,000 people.

So far, the Jews of Budapest had been largely spared, but Eichmann fully intended to kill them all. To his surprise and disgust, his plans were interrupted by none other than Admiral Horthy, who reasserted control of the Hungarian government, called loyal troops to the capital to defend against a coup from the right (!), and then ordered the deportations to stop. The order became public on July 7. Although Eichmann tried several times to defy this order both directly and by stealth, Horthy was able to defeat most of his efforts. Toward the end of August Himmler suspended the deportations to Auschwitz until further notice, and Eichmann was forced to leave the country. Some 250,000 surviving Jews in Budapest had received a reprieve, at least, from certain death.

A miracle! To many, it seemed nothing less. What had happened? Why did Horthy act? A survivor's account written many years later underscores the victims' bewilderment: "On the 6th of July 1944 Miklós Horthy ended the deportation of the Jews to Auschwitz for reasons still unknown today. There are many theories regarding this decision ... Without Hungarian support Eichmann was not able to continue shipping "raw material" to the death factory of Auschwitz, and this decision that Horthy made angered Eichmann greatly."¹¹ However, to a great extent the reasons for Horthy's turnaround *are* known.

Late in June 1944 an unprecedented wave of denunciations, outrage, anger, and threats of postwar retaliation broke out in the West. It began in Switzerland, where leading Protestant clerics denounced the Nazi mass murder in the country's major churches, the press broke through long-established censorship of anything anti-German to publish dramatic and angry articles about Auschwitz and the atrocities in Hungary, and huge popular demonstrations were held in major cities. In all over 180 Swiss newspapers spanning the political spectrum published articles about the Hungarian persecution. The stories were reported in the foreign press as well, including the United States and Britain. Pope Pius XII sent an open letter to Horthy urging him to act against the deportations. Religious leaders including the archbishops of Canterbury and New York joined the campaign. On June 26 President Roosevelt sent Horthy the first of two strong messages including threats of military action, and a heavy American air raid on Budapest on July 2 seemed to reinforce that warning. King Gustav of Sweden appealed to Horthy, and authorized Raul Wallenburg's famous mission to Budapest that activated formerly passive Swedish diplomats there. Even the Hungarian Catholic Church took belated action in the form of a mild pastoral letter criticizing the deportations. This campaign had a remarkable effect. Horthy took control of the Hungarian government, dismissed several of the most pro-Nazi officials, and ordered the death trains stopped.

The campaign of denunciations and Horthy's decision to halt the deportations have of course been recorded by most historians of the Holocaust in Hungary. In many of those accounts, however, George Mantello is mentioned barely or not at all. The index to Raul Hilberg's monumental trilogy *The Destruction of the European Jews*¹² does not include Mantello's name, nor is there any mention of Consul Castellanos or even of El Salvador itself. In another major study, Leni Yahil wrote that

In the meantime reports on these developments in Hungary were being published in the press throughout the free world, leaving the Sztójay government embarrassed. ... *for the first time in the history of the Holocaust, an international effort was made to halt the extermination operation.* President Roosevelt, Pope Pius XII, King Gustav of Sweden, and the president of the Red Cross all appealed to Horthy to stop the deportations and to save, at least, the Jews of Budapest...¹³ (Emphasis added.)

It is surprising that Yahil (and others) do not investigate *why*, after years of silence, that outstanding international effort was made “for the first time” in June 1944, but his work, like that of Hilberg, completely ignores the role of the Salvadoran diplomats.

In fact, of course, the Swiss campaign did not just happen; at the core of this remarkable outpouring of concern and outrage was the work of George Mantello. Carl Lutz, the Swiss consul in Budapest who himself played an admirable and heroic role, wrote Mantello on July 20:

As I have learned recently, you stand out as the “spiritus rectus” behind the press campaign in Switzerland, which has brought to the public at large information concerning ... [the] distress of the Jewish population of Budapest... The immediate effect has been the suspension of the deportations... It can be said that thanks to your campaign, the imminent catastrophe was greatly reduced.¹⁴

Post-war Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal makes the same point in his foreword to an admiring biography of Lutz:

But Consul Lutz and the other neutral diplomats in Budapest were largely powerless against the deportation of 350,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz between May 15 and July 8, 1944. This was stopped under international pressure when Horthy, Hungary's regent, suspended the deportations temporarily. His order was largely the result of an unprecedented press campaign in neutral and western countries, which -- with the indirect help of Consul Lutz -- George Mandel-Mantello, a Hungarian Jewish refugee in Switzerland, had unleashed...¹⁵

The success of Mantello's activism depended, first of all, on having full and reliable information. A Swiss committee for the Hungarian Jews (SHC), which he had helped organize the day after the German invasion, quickly met with major Jewish and other concerned organizations in Switzerland to seek better cooperation among them. Mantello explained the ongoing work with Salvadoran identity papers, and pleaded for rapid sharing of information about the situation in Hungary.

Unfortunately the response was minimal. Among others, the International Red Cross (IRC) had access to considerable news of the disaster there, but it did, and said, nothing.

The information blockade was broken only after two young Jews on April 7 made a remarkable escape from Auschwitz itself. The two, known as Rudolf Vrba and Josef Lanik (his original name was Alfred Wetzler), had worked in the death camp for nearly two years as clerks, and their skills not only kept them alive but also gave them the chance to know the operation of the murder factory in detail. By late April they had prepared a 26-page report, which came to be known as the "Auschwitz Protocols." Now the end result of the ghettos and deportations was absolutely clear: it was mass murder, nothing less. Copies and summaries of this horrifying—and reliable—document were sent to many people and agencies, Jewish and not, in the "free world." At least five organizations in Switzerland were notified. Appeals went to Allied governments to do *something*, but nothing happened. None of the recipients shared the information with Mantello, despite his efforts and pleas for cooperation, nor did the reports have any public impact. Another breakthrough had to occur first.

Dr. Florian Manoliu was a commercial attaché of Romania and a former business partner of Mantello's brother Josef Mandl, now also living in Switzerland. He agreed to undertake a rescue and reporting mission, and left Switzerland for Bucharest on May 22. The trip was difficult and dangerous; Manoliu managed it at great personal risk. Ignoring the restrictions on his travel documents, he visited Bistrice, the home of the Mandl parents and extended family – and found the town had become "Judenrein." The protective Salvadoran documents he had planned to give them were a few days too late; all had been deported. Traveling to Budapest he discovered the desperate situation and fear that gripped Hungary's remaining Jewish population of some 250,000. From Swiss Consul Carl Lutz and Miklós Krausz of the Palestine immigration organization he received documentary proof of the continuing atrocity, including a summary of the Auschwitz Protocols. Ignoring his own danger, Manoliu then returned directly to Switzerland. At 2:00 AM on June 21 he delivered the tragic personal news, and the reports, to Mantello and Josef.

That very night the grief-stricken brothers set to work on a campaign to force the world to listen. An emergency meeting of the SHC was convened the next morning. In the meantime, a team of Hungarian university students prepared translations and multiple copies of the reports. Urgent contacts were sought with foreign organizations, including the (U.S.) War Refugee Board. This organization should have been at the forefront of rescue efforts, but skepticism and delay were the specialties of its head Roswell McClelland, and the WRB's activity was little and late. The International Red Cross also saw no need for any urgent response. Fortunately others acted better. Freddy West of British Intelligence and the director Walter Garrett of the news agency British Exchange Telegraph responded to Mantello's urgent requests by sending long cables summarizing the crisis to their own superiors and to a list of world leaders including President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and the Pope. Copies also went immediately to the offices of major Swiss and foreign newspapers. Religious leaders, especially well-known Protestant pastors such as Paul Vogt (already active in aiding refugees) and theologian Carl Barth, gladly joined in enlisting their colleagues and raising a voice of outraged Christianity. Within a very few days the truth about the murder of Hungarian Jewry was made known to government agencies and NGOs throughout the West in ways that could not be ignored. Powerful sermons were preached in the principal churches of Switzerland. Messages to Horthy arrived from F.D.R., Swedish King Gustav, and the Pope. Pastor Vogt had thousands of copies of the Auschwitz report printed, and almost as quickly

he published them again in a book that included his own sermons denouncing the Nazi murder campaign. By late June the Swiss press had begun defying years of censorship to report and editorialize about the fate of the Jews. Once the dam was broken hundreds of articles followed rapidly. Mass demonstrations and memorial services were held in major Swiss cities. Local government bodies, but not the national government, joined the campaign. The wave of protest swelled in July and continued throughout the summer. There was no question that the conscience of the Swiss people was deeply stirred, and many of them acted in the best ways available to them.

And then what? The campaign had enormous effects! It was discussed in Budapest, in Switzerland, in Stockholm, in communications between Hitler and his subordinates, in the Vatican, in Britain and in the United States. It moved Horthy to reassert control and order the deportations stopped. For the first time the atrocity against the Jews of occupied Europe was front-page news in the West; for the first time the name "Auschwitz" became a synonym for evil. The campaign created activists out of bystanders. "There is no doubt," Kranzler writes, "that the change in the stance and activities of the neutrals and the Allies was a direct result of this incredible Swiss press and church campaign."¹⁶

There were repercussions for the Swiss government as well. The policy of "refoulement" was partially rescinded on July 12, and rescue instead of neutrality became the top official goal. The International Red Cross, essentially an agency of the Swiss government, was forced at last to intercede for Jewish prisoners and for the threatened Jews of Budapest. An aide to Pastor Vogt summed it up in a letter to Mantello:

As far as the atrocities in Hungary were concerned, one simply had to do everything possible to publicize the [two] reports and thereby produce a groundswell of protest by the people, which first led to the intervention of the IRC.... Thank God our efforts were not futile.¹⁷

The Swiss campaign could hardly have received much support or even attention from El Salvador during its first months, since General Martínez was in deep trouble trying to hold on to power. Already in 1943 his dictatorial governing style and quasi-legal maneuvers to gain another presidential term ran into increasing resistance, and in April of 1944 a military revolt broke out. Martínez succeeded in putting down this rebellion, but it was quickly followed by a largely non-violent general strike involving nearly all sectors of urban society. The strike proved effective; Martínez resigned on May 9 and left the country for good two days later. He was replaced by General Andrés I. Menéndez, serving for the second time in his life as an interim acting president.¹⁸ With Menéndez came a new cabinet including as foreign minister the writer Julio Enrique Avila. Democracy returned to El Salvador for the moment, but the situation remained chaotic and volatile.

And at just this critical time, diplomatic activity was required! Some 10,000 Salvadoran citizenship papers were in the hands of threatened Hungarian Jews--but how valid were they? Swiss government recognition of the irregular Salvadoran documents was essential in order for the Swiss officials in Budapest to protect their holders. Encouraged by U.S. President Roosevelt, the new foreign minister Avila in San Salvador and consul Castellanos in Geneva did what they could to back Mantello's campaign. In Switzerland, however, highly-placed reactionaries and anti-

Semites worked hard to obstruct the rescue efforts including the Salvadoran citizenship papers, while at the same time the press and church campaign exerted great pressure on the Swiss government to act humanely. Finally the documents were recognized, so that Swiss protection was afforded to Budapest's "Salvadoran citizens." In the end, the Salvadoran certificates proved to be the most effective of all the protective papers held by Budapest Jews.

Unfortunately the ordeal of the surviving Hungarian Jews was far from over. The uneasy calm that began with the halt to deportations ended on October 15, when a coup organized by German and Hungarian fascists deposed the "unreliable" Horthy and installed pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic Ferenc Szalasi as premier. Eichmann returned to Budapest on October 17. With the enthusiastic help of the vicious "Arrow Cross" party, he set out to complete the murder of the Jews in the last months remaining before the arrival of the Red Army. During this critical period many of the neutral diplomats in Budapest, led by Swiss Consul Carl Lutz and Swedish emissary Raul Wallenburg, performed tireless and heroic service. They succeeded in saving tens of thousands of lives, and the Salvadoran citizenship papers, supplied as rapidly as possible by Mantello and his team and now backed by the Swiss government, were an essential tool in their work, together with documents from other nations such as Sweden. Lutz wrote Mantello a long letter on October 28, saying that

Naturally, under the present chaotic conditions attacks do occur, but it must be said that the San Salvador [sic] certificates have already saved thousands of lives....

... you can take satisfaction in the fact that ... it was your management of the San Salvadoran interests which has enabled us to create a humanitarian work that will bring you the thanks of thousands of rescued people. It must be clearly established that San Salvador is the only state to overcome any hesitancy and to undertake an active rescue operation.¹⁹

Despite incredible scenes of murder and horrendous death marches, when liberation came to Budapest at last in January and February 1945, some 140,000 Jews were alive to welcome it. They were a tragic remnant--and yet their survival represented a triumph for the side of life. Without Horthy's "conversion" and the halt to mass deportations by rail in July 1944, the Final Solution would have finished its work and eliminated the entire Jewish population of Hungary.

"The fact remains," says David Kranzler, "that only the Swiss people made a major difference in the fate of Hungarian Jewry. Galvanized by Mantello and inspired by outstanding church leaders, they sought to use the press and church to effect changes in the events in Hungary, and they succeeded beyond anyone's expectation."²⁰

Kranzler's book ends with this summary and tribute. "At a time when he [Mantello] was needed, he did not hesitate to do everything in his power to assure the survival of the Jews of Budapest. He was the driving force behind the incredible transformation of the Swiss people, who carried on their newly found tolerance for refugees long into the postwar era; he was the catalyst behind the protective papers operation that saved countless lives." Kranzler concludes that while the Nazi atrocities showed the worst of which humanity is capable, "[Mantello], his colleagues, the Swiss people and Salvadoran officials were proof of the lofty heights to which it could rise... For a short,

blazing moment, Mantello lit up the darkness of the Holocaust, reaching the apex of rescue – and then fading into the recesses of history.”²¹

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After the war, George Mantello should have been honored in Switzerland as a hero. Instead, he faced a government investigation for alleged bureaucratic “crimes” committed during his efforts to save lives. Heinrich Rothmund, the head of the Swiss Alien Police and a fanatical anti-Semite, was apparently behind this attack; indeed, Rothmund had tried at every opportunity to sabotage the earlier rescue efforts. Fortunately the proceedings brought forth many testimonials to the value and selflessness of Mantello's work and he was fully cleared of all charges. Mantello chose not to remain in Switzerland, and lived in Rome for the rest of his life, making frequent visits to the new state of Israel. He died in 1992.

Col. Castellanos also encountered political problems after the war. With the fall of the Nazi regime imminent in February 1945, he left his diplomatic post and returned to El Salvador. But the brief (and fortuitous!) democratic window that had followed the overthrow of General Hernández Martínez was now closed, and Castellanos and other officers whom the new president considered threatening were soon forced into exile. Daughter Frida Castellanos, speaking at the U.S. Holocaust Museum in 2012, recalled that

Five days after coming back to El Salvador, he was asked to accompany two gentlemen dressed as policemen to the border with Guatemala and told not to come back. He was later exiled to Mexico... In 1992 El Salvador became a democracy, but my father didn't live to see that.

After living more than two years in Mexico, another political change allowed Castellanos to return home, and in 1950 he was appointed El Salvador's Minister to Great Britain, a post he held until 1956. He spent his later years living peacefully in San Salvador, where he died in 1977.

In 2010 Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, posthumously awarded to Col. Castellanos the title of *Righteous Among the Nations*, recognition honoring non-Jews who risked their lives, liberty, or positions to save Jews during that terrible time.

Notes:

¹ Revised, January 2013. An earlier version, with "Hero" in the singular, paid too little attention to the contributions of other Salvadorans, especially Col. Castellanos, as well as Mantello.

² Letter from Carl Lutz to George Mantello, quoted in David Kranzler, *The Man Who Stopped the Trains to Auschwitz*, Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000, pages 207-208.

³ See for example Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pages 510-512. (Translation from Hebrew edition of 1987.)

⁴ Patricia Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection in El Salvador: The Fall of Maximiliano Harnández Martínez*. Tuscon: U. of Arizona Press, 1988, page 28.

⁵ After the war the couple divorced and Mantello remarried. He became the father of two more children, a son and a daughter.

⁶ Private communication from David Kranzler, who adds that Mantello knew French, German, Romanian, Yiddish and Hungarian--but not Spanish.

⁷ The number is still in dispute. Many Salvadorans believe there were 30,000 dead, although Thomas Anderson estimated 8000 to 10,000 victims.

⁸ Interview with Frieda Castellanos in the film "Glass House" plus private communication from Erik Ching.

⁹ There seems to be no record of such a request, but it is impossible to prove that it was never made.

¹⁰ The following account is largely based on Kranzler, *The Man Who Stopped the Trains to Auschwitz*.

¹¹ Natalie Simone Wicks, "The Chosen Ones: Michael's Story," page 20. Pamphlet, distributed by Omlet Publications c/o ataplow@jhu.edu.

¹² Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (3 vols.) New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

¹³ Yahil, *The Holocaust*, pages 513-514.

¹⁴ Letter quoted in Kranzler, *The Man Who Stopped the Trains...*, page 168.

¹⁵ Preface to Theo Tschuy, *Dangerous Diplomacy: The Story of Carl Lutz, Rescuer of 82,000 Hungarian Jews*. Wm Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK, page x.

¹⁶ Quoted in Kranzler, *The Man Who Stopped the Trains...*, page 179.

¹⁷ Ibid, page 172.

¹⁸ For a full account see Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection in El Salvador*.

¹⁹ Kranzler, *The Man Who Stopped the Trains...*, page 207-208.

²⁰ Ibid, page 176.

²¹ Ibid, page 253-254.

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