



# German Occupation and Ghettoization of Sighet

## **ETERNAL ECHOES**

Teach and Learn About the Holocaust

# German Occupation and Ghettoization of Sighet

On 19 March 1944, Nazi Germany occupied its erstwhile ally Hungary, a treacherous act that happened for a variety of reasons. Germany wished to keep Hungary in the battle against the Soviet Union. Hungarian head of state Miklós Horthy and other Hungarian leaders wished to abandon. Also important for understanding this occupation of an ally was the fact that Hitler, Himmler and other leading Nazis were greatly irritated that so many thousands of Jews remained alive in Hungarian territory, including Northern Transylvania.

© Ghetto Fighters Museum



The Ghetto of Munkács is guarded by military polis.

Swiftly after March, Jews throughout the Hungarian countryside, including Northern Transylvania and Sighet, were forced to leave their homes to occupy what became short-lived ghettos. Actually, many of these so-called ghettos were simply points of assembly before deportation out of Hungary.



Admiral Miklós Horthy, Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, during a conference with Adolf Hitler.

© Wikipedia Commons Commons





© Yad Vashem

A deserted street in the area of the Sighet ghetto. This photograph was taken after the deportation of the ghetto population.

In Sighet, orders were issued on 18-20 April 1944 for all Jews to move into two segregated areas. Some 11,000 Jews were forced into the “large” ghetto, in fact a small urban area of only some four streets. A “smaller” ghetto was established for the city’s poorer Jews in a slum area on the outskirts of the city. Jews living in the nearby countryside were also moved into this area.

Local Hungarians and gendarmes from other regions of Hungary guarded these ghettos. And, even though these ghettos did not last long, the Germans – according to their “model” established elsewhere in Eastern Europe – ordered the establishment of so-called “Judenräte”, or “Jewish Councils”. In Sighet, Rabbi Samu Danzig headed this “Council”.



Rabbi Samu Danzig.

© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Morris Spitzer

© Wikipedia Commons



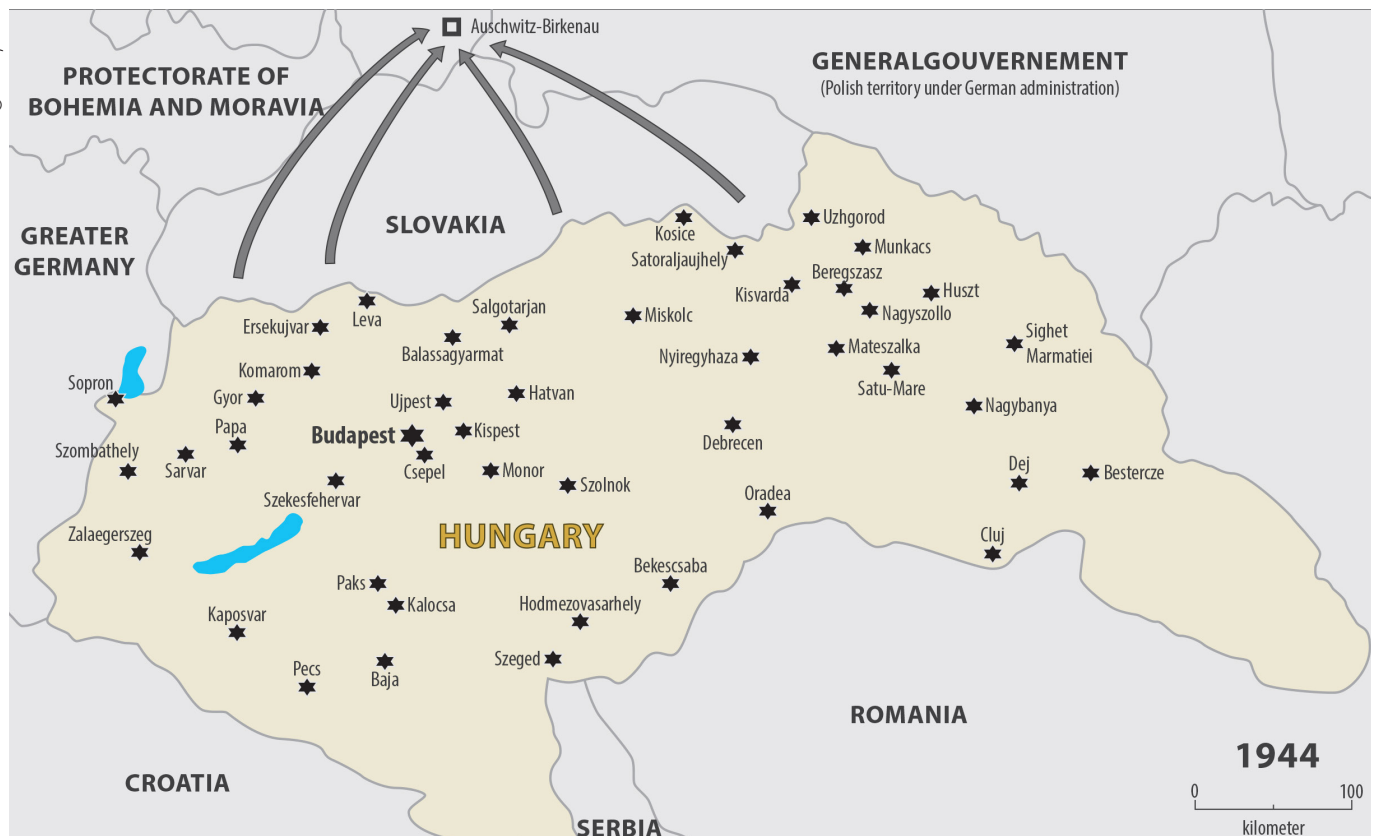
Adolf Eichmann, German SS Lieutenant-Colonel.

In occupied Hungary, the SS officer Adolf Eichmann directed the anti-Jewish drive. At the end of April, he visited Sighet, seeking to “study” how both the Jews in the ghetto were reacting to their new situation, and to see how their Hungarian neighbours were reacting to this drastic change.

In mid-May 1944, countless, cruel and inhumane transports began from throughout the Hungarian countryside. The destination was the gas chambers of the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

During spring 1944 Jews are deported to Auschwitz from all ghettos in Hungary, with the exception of Budapest.

© SKMA/SCAA







Jews headed for the railway station in Sighet to be deported from the ghetto.

The liquidation of Sighet's ghettos occurred between 17 and 20 May 1944. Four transports bound for Auschwitz-Birkenau were organized, emptying these temporary assembly points.

Most of those deported in these transports were murdered upon arrival. Some, however, were selected for labour either in that camp or in other camps. This is what accounts for the survival of Hédi and Livia and also for some other Jews from Sighet. And it is from their memories that we have accounts of what happened.



Jews gathered for deportation.

© 2013/2014, 2019 the authors and the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism

Text: Daniel Stejeran, director of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust Memorial, Simleu Silvaniei/Paul A. Levine, Ph.D., History

Fact checking: Paul A. Levine, Ph.D., History

Graphic design: Cecilia Undemark Péterfy/Karl Gabor