

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 4th, 1995 #1
Byline Italics (Columns 1- 4)

“Szombathely was bombed a half a century ago on this date”

“Fifty years ago, on March 4th 1945, Szombathely woke up to a lovely early spring day. The sky was incredibly blue. The wind brought the smell of spring from Calvary Hill, when all of a sudden sirens sounded. The Liberators started roaring and soon the deadly bombs began showering down with horrific force. The earth was trembling, and a frightful rumbling sound accompanied the monstrous destruction. The sky darkened, and a snow-shower fell upon the city, as if nature itself was trying to cover up the shame.”

Source: Vas Népe Newspaper, (page 13), March 4, 1995, Szombathely

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 4th, 1995 #2
(Columns 1-4)

“Protected by the Cross”

Dr. Joó Lajosné, a wartime Red Cross nurse, started off to take her routine shift at the current college’s old building, known then as the Faludi High School, that was designated as the No. 523 military hospital during the war.

---We had not expected anything unusual that day ---she remembers. We were working, and the pre-warning siren alert elicited the usual reaction in us.

---*Why was the pre-warning siren alert activated?*

---Basically, it warned us of the possible appearance of the planes. The major alert consisted of an intermittent siren sound and the whistling of the locomotives, and the bombing raids started shortly thereafter.

---Were there any obvious warning signs that Szombathely will receive carpet-bombing?

---We noted that the planes circled around over the city for a long time. They departed, and then returned again. Since we were expecting the usual bombing raid, we opened the windows in order to protect the glass from the blast. The patients who were able to walk were allowed to leave. They would go outdoors. They could even eat fried bread at one of my relatives' house near the park, which is now the Boating Lake. The rest of the people were required to remain at the facility. At the sound of the siren, the patients and staff took cover in the trenches or in the basement. When the planes arrived, some of my co-workers and I were in the telephone switchboard room. Although we did not see any insignias, we suspected that the British and American planes were rumbling over the city. I call the stripes that the airplanes leave in the sky "smoke". The sound of the bombing and the smoke level in the air was incredible. I hope what I experienced then, will never return in my dreams. Bombs were exploding all around us, and buildings disappeared from the face of the earth. We watched the Cathedral receiving a hit. An enormous smoke-cloud remained in its wake. Our building also shook; we thought it might collapse. I watched the policemen, stationed in front of the hospital to enforce the curfew, laying face down on the ground several times. The large airplanes departed during the noon-hours, leaving tragic silence behind.

---Did the military hospital building receive a direct hit?

---Fortunately, it did not. I believe we were protected by the shape of the Red Cross, which was laid out in tiles on our rooftop. I recall that the window of our switchboard room burst open when the bombing started. The German patients acknowledged the attack, remaining remarkably calm and disciplined. There was no panic during the carpet-bombing, and credit for that is largely due to the commander of the hospital, Dr. Sándor Tiborc, chief surgeon.

---What was the city like?

---We went to see the Cathedral in the evening. It was a sad sight. A huge pile of debris blocked the view where the nave used to be; only steeples remained standing. I think they had another intended target, but happened to hit this structure. The building that used to stand where the Meszöv headquarters are now was also hit. The city lay in ruins; dead bodies and wounded people crossed our path. Not to mention the smell. The stench in the air was unbearable. I learned in the afternoon that the roof of our family home on Mihály Akacs Street was also blown away by the bomb hitting nearby. When I arrived home, I discovered a crater in our

yard, into which you could fit our house. It was created by a chained-bomb...

Source: Vas Népe Newspaper (page 13) March 4, 1995, Szombathely

Researcher's note:

Third paragraph above: "Planes circled the city". There was indeed congestion of aircraft over the city following the initial single bomb run of the 485th Bomb Group, which hit the cathedral. The 460th Bomb Group, as reported in the Mission Summary No. 181, reported circling the city twice to get a better view of the target (the Marshalling yard) on a visual approach. The 464th Bomb Group also reported difficulty in seeing the target due to heavy smoke over the city.

It is remarkable that the nurse's memory of the bombing in 1945 is corroborated by the Mission Summary No. 181 of March 4th, and I would guess that Dr. Joó Lajosné had never seen this Army Air Corps report now available in English on this website with the Hungarian version to follow shortly.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 4th, 1995 #3
(Column 5)

"From A Little Girl's Diary"
Interview with Dr. Vásárhelyi Tiborné

Dr. Vásárhelyi Tiborné lives in Szombathely. She wrote a diary when she was a little girl, from which we quote an excerpt dated March 4th, 1945.

"This day began as all the others. The sirens sounded in the morning, residents started fleeing from the city and were hastily arriving to our bunker. This day cannot be taken seriously, for it is springtime and the sun is shining. Who wants to be scared on such a day? We go up the hill as usual and are listening from up above how the sky almost falls down from the rumbling of the airplanes. Slowly, we spot the planes way up high, and we lie down in the grass to get a better view, and we start counting them, five, eight, tenth, twentieth... then one airplane comes down lower, and something black giving a whistling sound dropped out of it... Then we hear a giant explosion and see smoke in the direction of the railroad station. We are frozen with fright. Then someone among the adults yells to run for the

bunker. So we race down the hill, and this road seems enormously long until we reach the entrance! The ground shakes and resonates with the sound of explosions, and we have the illusion as if the bombs were falling right around us. What will happen if our house is gone when we emerge from the bomb shelter? And our clothes? We only have a few suitcases with our valuables and some food. Dear God, we do not want to die. Please help us. I plead and I pray, as do men and women around me, some of them aloud. After a long while, silence settles in, and some of the men venture outside, with me tracking behind them. As I approach the exit, it becomes brighter and brighter after every turn, and then I see the shining sun. I climb the last few stairs cautiously, and observe total silence even though my ears are still ringing after the enormous blasts. Then I spot our house! It was not bombed, hallelujah! I am yelling but no one seems to pay attention to me. I run into our house, stroke the door jambs and the walls lovingly, dash into my room opening my drawers, staring at my old toys and favorite books, then continue into the kitchen to my favorite corner... everything is here – My God, it is good to be alive!

I run across our yard, out into the street, but my euphoria evaporates quickly. People are dragging themselves around, carrying their valuables in their hands or on their backs. A man yells from across the street saying, that the city received carpet-bombing, especially around the railroad station. The railroad yard is burning, and entire streets disappeared. I cannot listen, so I run up the hill to watch the black smoke snaking upward to the sky from several locations. I wonder how many dead bodies are lying under the ruins in the cellars. I stand there with a dry throat and without comprehending.”

Source: Vas Népe Newspaper (page 13) March 4, 1995, Szombathely

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 3rd, 1990 #4
(Columns 1 and 2)

"It Happened in the Year of Our Lord 1945"

“March 4th should be a day of mourning in Szombathely. People in the city experienced the most horrific event of WWII on this day in 1945. I purposely did not use the word “citizens”, because Szombathely was considered the “capital” of Hungary in those days. The population had

multiplied, reaching a quarter million persons. People lived in pantries and closets with multiple families occupying each apartment. Many entering the city were refugees, and people evacuated from other parts of the country. The Nazi leadership had settled in the city for a time, which was previously known as the “Queen of the West”, as did several ministries and government offices from Budapest. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, fleeing from the advancing Russian troops, took a rest here, and gathered courage for continuing their escape westward. The citizens of Szombathely lived through miserable weeks and months. They paid a multiple price for the scourge of the war. The exhausted residents were struggling for survival amidst the shortages of food and other goods. They endured the repeated horror of the bombing raids, the most horrific of which took place on March 4th, 1945. This is what the citizens of Szombathely and Vas County will commemorate tomorrow”.

Source: Vas Népe Newspaper (page 7) March 3, 1990, Szombathely

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 3rd, 1990 #5
(Column 1 and 2)

“The sky turned dark”

...An elderly man:

“It only lasted a few minutes. When I stepped out of the gate of the Dimicante House, one could still see the “milky way” (contrails) left by the Liberators, and dust clouds were swirling from the direction of the Cathedral. I started out towards the Cathedral, stumbling over the ruins and debris, but only made it as far as the Bishop Szily Statue (facing the Cathedral). The Cathedral spectacle was horrible. I became paralyzed with fear at seeing the destruction, and could not proceed any farther.

We had sunshine in the morning, and the wind was gently moving the tree branches, but by the time the terrible destruction ended, snow began to fall rendering the streets slushy, dirty and muddy”.

Source: Vas Népe Newspaper (page 7) March 3, 1990, Szombathely

Author: János Pósfai

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 3rd, 1990 #6
(Column 1)

“A Szombathely Celebration”

... In his book titled Szombathely Celebration, István Toronyi Németh immortalized the events of March 4th, 1945:

“Spring breezes chased white clouds over the city, in whose cathedral bishop Sándor Kovács celebrated High Mass honoring Pope Pius XII on the occasion of the anniversary of his Holiness’ coronation. But the festive strains of the Te Deum were suddenly overwhelmed by the wailing sound of air-raid sirens. The Holy Eucharist was quickly taken to the safety of subterranean crypts. In the next hour and a half many bombs were showered on the city, destroying the church and burying more than half-a-thousand people. The hands in the clock towers froze in position of five minutes before one o’clock, the bells were silenced... The vaulted roof structure, holding up the nave as well as the choir with the organ, collapsed in seconds. Nine altars became pulverized; Winterhalder’s and Spreng’s ceiling frescoes, Maulbertsch and Dorfmeister’s paintings became dust, together with the altars. Some of the worst devastation was caused by the blast, which ripped the marble cladding off the remaining structure, and left huge piles of rubble in the place of the altar and the pews.

From the rubble below the small pulpit, a woman’s faint pleas for help were heard. Fortunately she was rescued and treated for a broken leg. She had come from far away to visit her wounded soldier husband, and she happened to be in the church at the time when the air-raid sirens sounded. Two parishioners lay dead amidst the ruins. Two prominent members of the parish ministry also became victims of the bombing: Canon Lajos Kiss, Assistant to the Bishop, and Canon Joseph Pintér”.

Source: Vas Népe Newspaper (page 7) March 3, 1990, Szombathely
Author: János Pósfai

Researcher’s note: Two years after the bombing of the Cathedral, István Toronyi Németh attends the rededication of the Cathedral, and writes his book “Szombathely Ünnepe” describing the events and celebrations of the day. The English and Hungarian versions may now be read by linking off the site page “Rededication” of the website.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 1975 #7

As it appeared in the Vas Népe Newspaper of March 3, 1990
(Column 2)

“The Rude Bomb”

“Many people wrote extensively about the bombing raids on Szombathely. Among them was János Pap who dealt with this theme in detail in one issue of the Vasi Szemle Newspaper in 1975. One of his many statements asserts, that even though the British considered Hungary as an enemy combatant nation since December 1941, and the United States since June 1942, neither initiated an actual military intervention until after the Germans occupied the country. Prior to that time, they just flew over the country using our airspace as a corridor leading to somewhere else. The first bombing raid took place along the railroad station on October 7, 1944. This air raid resulted in 52 deaths. It did a lot of damage to the entire railroad network and the surrounding residential areas. Another bombing raid over the city a week later took nine lives. A few days later, on October 17th, a large Anglo-Saxon bomber formation passed over the city. A single airplane flew into position and dropped its deadly load along the railroad yard and tracks again. Three additional smaller bombing raids followed, then after a longer pause, the most horrific bombing took place on March 4, 1945. According to his narration, a large bombing formation executed carpet-bombing of the city center and the surrounding streets between the hours of 12:40 and 13:00.

Bombs and aerial mines fell on the city, causing extensive damage at Mátyás Király, Kossuth, Kisfaludy, Tolbuhin and Hunyadi Streets, as well as the vicinity of the Bishop's Palace. The incendiary mines set the Palace Hotel, the Tóth Károly Mill, and many residential buildings ablaze. We know from the documents written by the mayor of the city to the governor, that special military forces were requested for the rescue effort. Fifteen days passed since the March 4th terror bombing, and there are still un-recovered bodies at Széll Kálmán Street #23 and Erzsébet Királyné Street #1 (Researcher's note: This address was next to my wife's family apartment at #3 - #5 on the Főtér or Main Square) and the Palace Hotel. It is probable that there could also be more dead bodies under the rubble at the cathedral.

"The Bomb is Rude" according to the author. Szombathely received five more bombing raids* between March 25th and 29th. According to statistical

military records after the war, from the residential buildings numbering 4,471 in Szombathely, 3,375 were hit. Of this number, 1028 were severely damaged and 312 buildings totally destroyed. The overall bombing of our city was 21.5 percent of all structures that significantly affected the County's industry. The water works and the sewage system of the city were greatly interrupted in the March 4th bombing raid. The drinking water supply system was broken in 89 places, and the electricity network was totally incapacitated. Three weeks later, the textile factory, the largest plant in the County at the time, was virtually leveled. The 63 bombs falling on the factory annihilated 468 weaving machines; the water tower, the power supply facility and the steam generator were rendered useless. The brick-making factories were also wiped out, because the Germans stored large amounts of ammunition inside, exploding them before withdrawing from Szombathely. Transportation was crippled and all bridges were blown up. The railroad company was severely handicapped, since 90% of the locomotives were out of commission, 142 switching stations destroyed at the Szombathely rail-yards, and 25 kilometers of tracks became unusable.

One quote from the July 1st, 1945 edition of a local newspaper: ...'The locomotive repair facility received 115 direct hits. Not one building remained standing. The Germans finished off whatever the bombs left intact'. This is how Szombathely became the 5th most damaged city in the country. This destruction occurred in the last phase of the war, making it even more incomprehensible and senseless”.

Source: Vasi Szemle Newspaper March 1975, Szombathely
Author: János Pósfai

*Researcher's note:
Unconfirmed in US Army Air Corps documentation

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 3rd, 1990 #8
(Column 5-6)

“I kiss the heavy Cross”

“ The roaring of the bombers have not even dissipated, when the rescue effort began, to be followed by the reconstruction soon after. The Bishop’s flyer with a black border reached all the churches in the Diocese within one week. The prelate had written: ‘I kiss this heavy Cross, placed on my shoulders by my Lord... I do not despair but continue to pray even more ardently; continue to work more diligently. Help me with your prayers, contributions and your labor in order to reconstruct this Cathedral as soon as possible’.

The clearing of the rubble began with incredible effort and cooperation. This was true everywhere in the city, but especially at the Cathedral. Donations started pouring in. There was not a single person in the county, however poor, who did not contribute to the reconstruction of the cathedral in a small way. This generosity and flourishing labor will no doubt be mentioned during tomorrow’s commemorations. Rightfully, Sándor Kovács Diocesan Bishop wrote in the Foreword of a book on Christmas Eve, two short years later: ‘ There comes a time when the historian starts a new page when writing about these difficult and faith-defining times. We would like the diocese’s double holy days to be *Life and Reality* itself, and not just a fleeting memory or a historical holiday framed in a spectacle’. For the church was rebuilt by August, and Cardinal Mindszenty consecrated it with splendor and pageantry.

The Diocesan Bishop emphasized I his important sermon: ‘ We rebuilt our Cathedral, primarily to provide moral strength that could spread all over our Diocese’. Cardinal Mindszenty added: ‘ Happy is the nation that starts its reconstruction with the churches’.

Source: Vas Népe Newspaper, March 3, 1990, Szombathely

Author: János Pósfai

Researcher’s note: The complete “Forward” by Bishop Kovacs and the rededication story can be read by linking from the “Rededication Story Link” on the site page of this website.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from March 4th, 2008 #9

“Terror Bombing”

“American airplanes turned the county seat into ruins sixty-three years ago”.

“Szombathely - March 4, 1945. It was Sunday and the sun shone brightly. The American bombers appeared at noon, and smoke and dust covered the city after they departed. 368 people died that day.

" I left our temporary shelter on Tavaszi Street, heading towards our ruined house in Bébitz... The plowed fields were densely covered with craters, and I observed the dead bodies of several German soldiers. It was a dreadful sight. Upon my return, a horrible sight awaited me again on St. Martin Street. There were unrecognizable human remains, body parts, piled high in György Schöntag's horse-drawn carriage, surrounded with sheets of plywood.

This is how Gyula Zsoldos is recalling that day, sending his remembrances to Tibor Kosztolánczy, who is a retired electrical engineer and an acknowledged researcher and chronicler of the bombing raids in Szombathely.

The American and British aerial attacks on our city were not publicized much for a long time. The intention was not to emphasize the fact that the Allies also participated in the liberation of Hungary, explained Tibor Kosztolánczy. He found a report to that effect in the civil defense archives that was written nine days after the bombing attack by Colonel Károly Törseök, the local commander.

On this day, approximately 8 -100 enemy airplanes, flying in formation, bombed Szombathely in four waves between the hours of 12:43 and 12:49. The bombs dropped numbered approximately 700 - 800... It appeared to be terror bombing coupled with target bombing...from North West direction between the two creeks, Perint and Gyöngyös, proceeding through the middle of town, then South East direction towards the water tower and the gas works factory, the railroad underpass and the freight yard. The City Hall became uninhabitable as did the cathedral... 53 bombs fell on the railroad station. 150 wagons were incapacitated, as were several locomotives and all the rails. The County Hall was also damaged

somewhat, as was the Bishop's Palace, the Police Headquarters, Post Office and the Franciscan Church. 176 private residences were declared un-inhabitable, 381 more sustained damage. 336 families became homeless, consisting of 11,151 persons. 368 people died, of which 171 were men and 194 were women, and 3 people who died could not be identified. 36 women and 38 men sustained serious injuries, while 25 women and 23 men received minor injuries... Colonel Károly Törseök stated, that considering the more than 120,000 inhabitants of the city that day, and the inadequate supply of bomb shelters, the number of casualties can be considered low. The rescue mission ended on the fourth day after the bombing. Clearing the debris continued much longer. Even though the electrical power grid suffered major damage, electricity was restored within two days. The water supply lines were also damaged several places, but service was restored on the fifth day. The majority of the residents of Szombathely moved out of the city after the bombing.

Source: Vas Népe, March 4, 2008, Szombathely
Author: Mária Némethy

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

from Savaria Forum (Szombathely) from March 4, 2008 #10

“The bombing of Szombathely”

“It was a nice sunny March morning with a few clouds sweeping across the sky [...] From our yard, we were watching the first Bomber Squadron that was flying from the south-eastern part of the city towards the north in a formation. There were about 20 or 30 of them leaving con-trails behind them at about 5000 meters high. We were watching the planes till they left the town. A little later, after flying over the villages of Kámon and Herény, they turned around to come back again. We quickly ran down to the air-raid shelter located in the basement [...] I hardly got to the basement when 9 bombs exploded around us, fortunately on the streets, in gardens and in vacant lots.” The fourth wave was followed by a short break as well. We went to the yard, and saw it from there, that the roof of the Cathedral was missing and while dust and smoke filled the air. [...] This is the reminiscence of Iván Szterszky, who immigrated to Canada after 1956. He witnessed the arrival of the American-British joint air force from the yard of a house standing on the corner of Szegedy Györgyné and Akacs Mihály

Street on a Sunday noon, March 4, 1945. The essay published in Tibor Kosztolánczy's study titled 'Further details about the air raid of Szombathely on March 4, 1945' demonstrates well, that towards the end of the war, Szombathely did not expect to be the victim of a devastating air raid at all. Though the city received several shorter bomb attacks in October and November 1944, the frequent air-raid alarms, due to the bombers passing through, made people less concerned. This can be one explanation why, according to the first reports, the 700-800 explosive bombs and aerial mines dropped by the 80-100 planes flying in formation, killed about 500 citizens of Szombathely. The number of victims was greatly increased by the fact, that because of the approaching front line, the population of the city, together with the refugees, grew to almost 100,000. The most unfortunate about this event was, that the terror bombing didn't hit any military targets. The Americans wanted to demoralize the population, so they bombed the densely populated inner city and the district between the Perint and Göngyös creeks, leaving this section of the city in shambles. 557 houses became uninhabitable, making 336 families homeless. Four aerial mines hit the Cathedral at 12:47, and destroyed the City Hall on Berzsenyi Square as well. The strength of the bombing is indicated by the fact, that even though there were no significant battles nearby, Szombathely had suffered one of the greatest war damage among all Hungarian cities.