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Story

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In harm's way

By Eszter Balázs

THE late Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini is about as famous in Hungary as he is in France, even if he spent but a few days here. But those few days fell in the last part of October 1956, and Pedrazzini paid with his life for his journalistic ambitions.

His photos taken in revolutionary Budapest and during his previous trip to the Soviet Union are exhibited for the second time in Hungary, now in the National Museum.

Pedrazzini, a top Swiss-French photographer for Paris Match, crossed the Austrian-Hungarian border on October 27, 1956 to come and report on the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution.

On his way to Budapest, he stopped in Mosonmagyaróvár to document the funeral of the victims of a volley a few days before.

One of the pictures of the funeral, showing pain stricken faces of the survivors, can be seen on the exhibition.

Pedrazzini and his colleagues came to Budapest on October 29.

Staying at the Hotel Duna, Pedrazzini, a roving reporter, roamed the streets of Budapest.

Some of his pictures of the ruinous Nagykörút, covered with tree branches, debris, torn electricity cables and lined with bullet-stricken houses and exploded tanks, or of ordinary people equipped with guns ready to fight, show extremely tangibly the tension and danger.

Although he arrived at the capital in days of hope when a cease-fire began to replace the fighting, he found his way to the action: on one of his photos, a man firing, was evidently photographed from a hiding place behind a window pane.

On October 30, Pedrazzini went to Köztársaság tér to capture the fighting which had just broken out.

It is dramatic to follow his pictures showing first a peaceful square then the sight of a gathering with people burning photos of one-time Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi, followed by shots of stretcher bearers trying to escape from the line of fire with their load, and finally an insignificant, not particularly well-taken shot that would have surely been discharged, had that not been the last photo the 29-year-old photographer was destined to take.

Shot a dozen times and operated on immediately in the Péterfy Sándor utcai Hospital, he was considered by a French surgeon, the hastily arriving husband of his sister, to be in a hopeless state. Keen to move home at any cost, he was flown to Paris on November 3, to die on November 7.

Alongside the photos of Pedrazzini's last journalistic commission, the three-room exhibition showcases some of his photographs taken on his 1956 car journey to the Soviet Union, and two films about his last two trips.

Az út vége (The End of the Road)

The photographs of Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini

National Museum, Pest, District

VIII, Múzeum krt. 14-16.

Open: Tue-Sun 10am-6pm

Until December 23.