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Sweden honors centenary of WWII hero Wallenberg

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By The Associated Press



Photo credit: AP | Nina Lagergren tours a photo exhibition of her brother, the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm, Sweden, Dec. 20, 2011. Wallenberg, known for rescuing tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews from the holocaust, disappeared without a trace after the Soviet occupation of Budapest in 1945 and the exhibition will travel to Hungary, Germany, Russia, Israel, the U.S. and Canada on the centenary of his birth next year. (AP Photo/Jessica Gow/Scanpix Sweden) **

STOCKHOLM - (AP) -- Sweden will commemorate the centenary of the birth of Raoul Wallenberg in 2012 with a series of postage stamps and a touring exhibition about the World War II hero credited with rescuing tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews.

Organizers launched a photo exhibition about Wallenberg in Stockholm on Tuesday, and two new stamps that will go on sale in May. The exhibition will tour Hungary, Germany, Russia, Israel, the United States and Canada next year.

As Sweden's envoy in the Hungarian capital of Budapest from July 1944, Wallenberg saved 20,000 Jews by giving them Swedish travel documents, or moving them to safe houses. He also dissuaded German officers from massacring the 70,000 inhabitants of the city's ghetto.

However, he disappeared after being arrested by the Soviet army in Budapest in January 1945 and his fate has since remained one of the great mysteries of WWII.

The Russians have claimed Wallenberg was executed on July 17, 1947, but have never produced a reliable death certificate or his remains. Unverified witness accounts and new evidence from Russian archives suggest he was still alive years later.

Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said Tuesday that Wallenberg has given honor to Sweden.

"No other Swede in modern times has made such major, such manifest and such difficult contributions to the service of mankind or humanity as Raoul Wallenberg," he said. "As Swedes, we can feel proud of what Raoul Wallenberg did for others. But we must also feel shame over what was not done for him."

Ursula Ahlen, a spokeswoman for the 2012 celebrations, said research seminars about Wallenberg are scheduled to take place next year and at least four new books about his fate will be published.

In August, part of 13th Avenue in Brooklyn, New York will be renamed Raoul Wallenberg Avenue.
