

**A Short History of the
Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie**

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The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie

I. Preliminaries

Austrian Gendarmerie in Hungary

In 1849, Hungary lost its War of Independence against Austria. The country was guided by Imperial Orders, one of them establishing a law enforcement body called the Gendarmerie of the Austrian Empire. It consisted of sixteen gendarme regiments, of which five were stationed in the territory of Hungary. Its main duty was to control the public and, “checking of every popular movement in Hungary.” The official language for the regiments was German, their personnel recruited from Austrians and Czechs. The force was organized along strict military lines. All orders were given by the central government of Vienna through its Minister of Defense and Interior with the knowledge of the Inspector General of the Gendarmerie²⁰.

After seventeen years of absolutism “with the wise and patient leadership of Francis Deák, the Compromise of 1867 reestablished a parliamentary government not only in Hungary but in Austria as well. It assured Hungary’s constitutional independence involving public law and autonomy.’²¹

Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie in Transylvania

At the Compromise’s disposition the Austrian Regiments in Hungary were dissolved except for the ones in Transylvanian. The subordinates were divided between Austria and Hungary. The selection, training, discipline, and other military matters came under the authority of the Austrian Minister of Defense, the police service of Hungary came under the Minister of Interior. The Hungarian Parliament made yearly objections against this incomplete solution. Where upon Emperor King Franz Joseph in 1876 relinquished the Transylvanian Gendarmerie to the Hungarian Parliament, which changed its name and official language to Hungarian. At the same time he transferred Louis Schatz, a loyal Austrian gendarme lieutenant colonel, to chief administrator of the gendarme section of the Ministry of Defense at Budapest.²²

II. Establishment

Law of 1881, III

Since the old type of decentralized County Police, similar to the Sheriff's Department in the United States, were not able to keep law and order in Hungary, the Hungarian government decided to establish a gendarme corp. for the whole country, including the Transylvanian Gendarmerie.

For the preparation of establishing the law and Service Regulations of a Hungarian Gendarmerie, the government authorized at the Ministry of Defense Louis Schatz and Louis Jekelfalussy, who represented the Minister of Interior. The bill was passed by the Parliament, and became the law of 1881 III. Step by step the new Hungarian Gendarmerie took over its duties of the countryside.

The recruitment, training and initiation of the police work for the new districts was made by the commandant of the Transylvanian Gendarmerie, Franz Török, who had nine years of police administrative experience at the Austrian Gendarmerie.²³

Organization and Administration

The organization of five districts and an additional three others established by the Law of 1905 VII, followed the pattern of the Transylvania Gendarmerie. Each had a gendarme colonel or lieutenant colonel as commandant. Under him were two or three wings, each covered the territory of two or three counties. Under the wing commandant were two or three squadrons each having fourteen to eighteen gendarme posts. In 1925 the wings were renamed to sections, and the squadrons to wings. This organization was to remain unvaried until the end of World War II. The posts were the real law enforcement units, spread all over the country, their men patrolled in pairs day and night their assigned territories. Their duties were threefold: a) patrolling on foot or horseback to talk with people and to supervise convicted criminals; b) taking care of the courts, district attorneys', and county officials' legal requests connected with law and order; and c) investigate the crimes which they observed, ordered by the post leader or reported to them by the local population. It was prohibited for patrols to enter restaurants, bars, hotels, or private homes without an official order or invitation by the owner to prevent crimes or secure evidence. Everyone had a legal right to lodge a complaint against the behavior of gendarmes, therefore, they were obligated by the law to show their ID's, or tell their names and location of their post if requested.²⁴ Between 1939 and 1941, some of neighboring territories, that were overwhelmingly Hungarian, were returned to Hungary. As a consequence the number of gendarme districts increased from nine to ten.

The jurisdiction of the Gendarmes was to enforce the laws in the countryside, like the Sheriff's Department in the United States. In cities the law enforcement was conducted first by the City Police and later by the recently established centralized State Police forces.

Contract Law Enforcement. The Law of 1882 X authorized the Minister of Interior to make contracts with those cities, which wanted to enforce the laws and administrative regulations with the Gendarmerie. By 1886, sixteen cities had changed by contracts their own police to the gendarme system.

Selection. The Directives of Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie of 1881, was the first, which prescribed the requirements for admission of gendarmes (NCO's) into the institution. The person who volunteered to the corp. must be: a Hungarian citizen; between the age of 20:40; unmarried or divorced without children; a minimum of 163 cm high; have a very good knowledge of the Hungarian language, reading, writing and arithmetic; excellent character; and perfect mental and physical health.²⁵ The Organizational and Service Regulations of 1941 followed the above mentioned requirements, but added 6-8 years of formal education and must be loyal to the country. At the beginning the selected men were on probation for six months. This time was spent on special education and training first at the wing and later at the district headquarters. At the end of the probationary period, the gendarmes had to pass the final examinations to be a permanent member of the corp. They signed an obligation for three years of service, which was renewable yearly.

Training. In 1909 the government organized a special school for the instruction and training of the new gendarmes. The school was located at Nagyvárad, where the new building had 15 classrooms, 45 dormitories, officer and gendarme dining rooms, a cafeteria, a barbershop, a bowling alley, etc. (After World War II, Rumania was reinstated into its possession of the largest Hungarian gendarme school.) The gendarme officers were educated at the new building of the Gendarmerie on Böszörményi Street, which was built in 1901 when the Parliament passed the Law of 1899 XXIX. The Instruction period was six months, which was raised in the early thirties to twelve months.

Housing. The unmarried members of the gendarme posts lived at their headquarters, and the students of schools at dormitories. Everywhere there were kitchen facilities and cooks, the cost of meals were paid by the gendarmes themselves,²⁶

Pension. The officers and gendarmes had a good pension system. After ten years in service it was 40% of their salary, which grew by 2% with each year of additional service.

Superintendent. In 1894, the King appointed Ferenc Török to be the first superintendent of the Hungarian Gendarmerie.

Gendarme Section at the Ministry of Interior. For central services and identical management of law enforcement, in 1904 a gendarme section was established within the Ministry of Interior. Its first head was gendarme colonel Paul Kosztka. The authority and responsibility of the section was regulated by ministerial orders.

III. ERA of Revolutions

Heavy Tribulations

Around the turn of the century, some units of the Gendarmerie got a few unfortunate duties, when the civil administrators, instead of remedying the problems, sent units of gendarmes, state police and/or army to confront striking workers on the Great Hungarian Plain, and unhappy voters at the city of Élesd. Unfortunately, the gendarmes had no authority to refuse the execution of the administrative orders²⁷ which made a bad impression of the gendarmerie on the population.

In 1912, a larger unit of Gendarmerie was transported to Budapest to back up the State Police against turbulent and violent crowds,

Besides these services, in 1893 the gendarmes helped the health authorities to stop the cholera epidemic. During the first decade of 1900 they rescued individuals from flooded areas, where Gyula Csiszár alone saved twenty seven lives. At conflagrations they helped in fire—fighting and rescued persons who were trapped in the burning thatched houses. Between 1908 and 1918 the King and the Hungarian administration distributed 575 decorations to those who endangered their life in rescue operations.²⁸

Gendarmeries in the First World War

From 1867 law and order was maintained for the Hungarian Armed Forces through the “regimental gendarmes”. Its members were selected from and trained by the Army Regiments. At the request of the Minister of Defense, from 1894 the Hungarian Gendarmerie had to transfer for the length of wars 9 officers, 129 foot and 204 mounted gendarmes for military police duties. This contingent was raised throughout the First World War, which paralyzed the upholding of law and order in the country.²⁹

On June 10, 1914, the heir to the crown of the Monarchy and his wife were killed by a Serbian student. A month later, the First World War was started. When in 1915 the Austrian Hungarian Army occupied Serbia, Hungarian gendarme units were transferred there for public safety services, staying there until the end of 1918

When the Russian Forces reached the territory of Hungary the Spring of 1915, and Italy declared war on the Monarchy in the same year, the general staff had to utilize more gendarmes for “Military Gendarme” (police) services. Consequently, the manpower of the Gendarmerie in Hungary decreased greatly. The shortage was replaced by soldiers belonging to the secondary reserve. These

men, without any law enforcement training, were not able to give much help to the Gendarmerie. In addition to regular duties, the administration issued a lot of new decrees in connection with the changing war situation, which made a larger workload for the Gendarmerie. The Corps, for example, had to take care of different language-speaking refugees who escaped from the war zones, to supervise the quarters, employment and behavior of the great number of war prisoners,³⁰ to control wandering gypsies; to prevent the evasion of wartime fixed prices; to check the compulsory delivery of church bells for military purposes, etc.

As a consequence of the shortage of trained gendarmes, the main cities did not have sufficient peace-keeping forces for revolting, or revolutionary situations. Budapest, for example, had stationed only one gendarme company, which was filled mostly with untrained secondary reserve soldiers. The manpower of the State Police was no better.

October Revolution

During the year of 1918, on the front lines communist-oriented agents incited against the continuation of fighting and on October 26th, the Emperor-King asked armistice for his countries. These facts disorganized the military lines, and many officers and soldiers deserted their positions. Hungarian soldiers in large numbers went to Budapest, where on October 31 a revolution erupted. The first three days were purely military actions with the workers later taking over the leadership.³¹

On the evening of October 31, the Prime Minister, István Tisza's guards were disarmed, and he was killed by a group of ten soldiers. Its leader was Captain István Csernyák. His group consisted of one first lieutenant, two ensigns, three leathernecks, and three reserve soldiers.³²

For pacification of the Revolution, the King appointed gróf Mihály Károlyi of the Social Democratic Party as Premier of Hungary. The Gendarmerie remained neutral and continued its duties. The Károlyi regime hired sixty-four candidates who went to gendarme school, graduated and were employed in March, 1919.

Hungarian Soviet Republic

After a month of struggle, on March 19, the social democrats and communists reached an agreement to fuse, the two parties and assumed power. They established a Revolutionary Council, and its President, Béla Kun, started to build up a Soviet Republic with his forty-five member commissars. For defending the country, the new regime established the "Red Army," and for keeping law and order, the "Red Guard."

The first order of the Interior Department of the People's Commissars was to put the previous

police organizations into reserve position, and established a political commission to select for re-enlisting, from them experienced officers and men.³⁴ According to private information they also organized a gendarme battalion near the city of Kecskemét, but a couple of weeks later it was disarmed by the political police as unreliable. (Later, its members had to prove their political loyalty before they were reassigned in the National Army, Gendarmerie, or Police.)

The Red Army had a political section also, its commandant, Joseph Cserny, studied the methods of political police in the Soviet Union. His 'Lenin Boys' arrested Oscar Fery gendarme general, John Nelinka and Alexander Borhy gendarme lieutenant-colonels, and two days later hung them on the pipes of the sewers system of their headquarters' basement. The same night, on July 21, 1919, they threw their bodies into the Danube.³⁵

On March 26, 1919, the Revolutionary Council with its No. IV statute, established Revolutionary Military Tribunals. Their members, without any qualifications, could arrest, judge, hang, or execute anyone who violated the Revolutionary Council orders or were an "enemy of the proletariat." The Tribunals could hold trials anywhere and anytime without any further investigation. Appeal was not possible, and they executed the decisions immediately. The most ruthless leader of the Eastern tribunal was Tibor Szamuely for whom, after the collapse of the communist regime, the Austrian government denied the right of political asylum. When he tried to escape into Austria under a pseudonym, the Austrian gendarme attempted to arrest him, but he committed suicide. He was buried at the village of Savanyúkút. He was made a national hero of communist Hungary.³⁶

Gendarme Victims

Based on official reports and court judgments, Dr. Albert Váry listed 590 persons who were killed or executed by the communist regime, which lasted 133 days. Among them were twenty-seven gendarmes: one lieutenant-general, two lieutenant-colonels, one captain, one first lieutenant, six warrant officers, four post leaders, eleven sergeants, and one gendarme. Váry stated that his list is not complete, because he was not able to discover how many persons were killed within the Red Army and in the separated territories of Hungary, or died as a consequence of heavy tortures.³⁷

Counter Revolution

As the political terror of the "Lenin Boys" and the Revolutionary Tribunal increased, the opposition also grew. Those, whose life or interests were endangered, tried to seek protection, or left the communist dominated areas of Hungary. During the month of May 1919, these individuals joined together in the city of Szeged and under the protection of the occupying forces of the French army,

established a rival government for overthrowing the communist regime of Hungary. Julius Károlyi became the Prime Minister, Admiral Nicholas Horthy Minister of Defense, and Tibor Eckhardt the first undersecretary.³⁸ The military and gendarme personnel joined the national movement in large numbers. The communist regime collapsed after 133 days due to its faulted foreign policy and internal opposition. Its leaders fled to Austria.

White Terror

The large scale volunteering of Army officers to the Hungarian National movement gave birth to the establishment of independent officer's detachments. They first joined for the higher prestige, later because of the limitation of the manpower of the Army by the peace-treaty. They formed "gendarme battalions," like the "Prónay-, Héjjas-, Ostenburg Gendarme Reserve Battalion" and "Technical University Gendarme Battalion." Their organization and discipline were so loose, that they were able to take revenge for communist atrocities. The behavior of some detachments did more damage than good, their brutality produced foreign propaganda against Hungary and postponed the reestablishment of the inner order and balance of the country.³⁹ Others, because a larger number of Jewish persons joined the Peoples' Commissars, took sides with anti-Semites. "A great part of the assimilated Jewry however preserved its loyalty to the country, some of them falling victims to the Terror."⁴⁰ At the invitation of the Hungarian government, English and American commissions went to Hungary, studied the criticized actions, registered that the basis of the atrocities were anti-communist and not anti-semitism.⁴¹

The Hungarian Gendarmerie did not participate in any "purification," contrarily, investigated and indicated the illegal actions of the suspected "white officers."⁴²

The illegal labeling of the army detachments and their atrocities badly hurt the prestige of the Gendarmerie since the population was not able to distinguish between gendarmes and the detachments' officers. Therefore, in 1927, the Minister of Interior ordered by the Organizational and Service Regulations of 1927 stated that persons transferred to support the gendarme corps were not authorized to use gendarme names and uniforms.

IV. Mutilated Hungary

Heavy Losses

On February 16, 1920, after the Rumanian Army left Budapest, the National Assembly elected as supreme commander Nicholas Horthy to the post of regent of Hungary. He marched into the capitol with his "White Army". On July 4, 1920, the Peace Treaty of Trianon, which was not ratified by the Senate of the United States, was signed. By this treaty, Hungary lost two thirds of its territory, more than 60% of its population, all gold, silver iron ore, salt mines, and 90% of its forestry. In addition, it had to pay a heavy war damage compensation.

In 1921, King Charles IV tried to establish a confederation from the different states of the Austrian Hungarian Monarchy. He attempted twice to regain the throne in Hungary, but his efforts were not successful.⁴³

Consolidation

In 1920, four gendarme districts were disbanded, The 1922 VII Law subordinated the remaining corps solely to the Ministry of Interior, although it kept its military discipline. Between 1922 to 1925, Hungary exchanged its convicted communists with the prisoners of war held by the Soviet Union.⁴⁴

Modernization

In the thirties, Hungary started to modernize the Gendarmerie. But because of the poverty of the country and the world depression the progress was slow.

Its first step was to establish three traffic control units in 1929 to patrol the highway between Budapest and the Western border of the country. The gendarmes used motorcycles with side cars which traveled forty kilometers per hour, and offered first aid to injured persons. After six years of experience, the traffic gendarme service was expanded to the whole country.

In 1930, four investigation units were established with 2 to 3 officers and 8 to 10 men. Their main duties were to support the local gendarme units with laboratory work and review any major crimes. Later every gendarme district received one smaller or larger investigative group.

During the years of the thirties, a short wave radio network was introduced. Direct communication was established between the Minister of Interior and gendarme districts, but the gendarme posts had only receiving stations.

In 1940 railroad and in 1942 water gendarme units were developed. The headquarters of the railroad units were located at larger railway junctions, and the water units at Lake Balaton. In 1943 the corps had three motorboats, each of them with a crew of four gendarme who give directions to lost watermen, towed in wrecked vessels and assisted in every manner those whose lives were in danger on the stormy waters.

Enlargement of the Country

Between September 29 and 30, 1933, the representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany held a conference at München for returning to Germany the populated territory from Czechoslovakia to Hitler's Third Reich. After two days, the München Agreement united the Sudetenland with Germany. In addition, the four big powers wanted to have another meeting, to solve the problems of Hungarian and Polish populations living behind the borders of neighboring Czechoslovakia, On October 28, 1938, Great Britain and France withdrew from the conciliation committee and delegated their authority to Germany and Italy.⁴⁵ This was a unfortunate decision because it moved neutral Hungary toward Italy and Germany. The first and second Vienna Agreement in 1939 peacefully returned from Czechoslovakia, and in 1940 from Rumania some of the heavily populated Hungarian areas.

After some border incidents with Czech Army units, Hungary occupied the territory of Ruthenia in 1939.

In 1944, Germany dealt with Yugoslavia. Croatia became an independent state and the Hungarian Army entered into Bach, which was a heavily populated Hungarian territory between the rivers Danube and Tisza.

Homecoming

Along with the Hungarian Army, gendarme units marched into the reoccupied lands. There were parades, with flowers, speeches, tearful eyes, and triumphal arches, which symbolized a real "homecoming."

The manpower of the Gendarmerie was not adequate for the growing territory of the country. It had to withdraw officers and men from the existing gendarme districts and establish new ones for the obtained territories To fill up vacancies, the corps accepted gendarmes and policemen from the new areas, who besides Hungarian also spoke the language of the local population.

In the Western area of Bachka major Árpád Zámbery was ordered with the use of 200 gendarme to establish posts in the reclaimed territories to enforce the law. His group stopped first in

the city of Szabadka, where he organized his headquarters. Then Zámbery instructed his gendarmes in the following way:

We have come home! You have to win the confidence of the population, regardless of their race, creed or native language. Do not forget to develop good relationships with the older generation, who remember us from the prewar years. You are also obligated to handle everybody with equality, patience, and understanding.⁴⁶

Then the posts, the small gendarme units started to familiarize themselves with their villages, their new homes, where they would enforce the law and order, and help in solving the daily legal problems.

V. The Tragic Years

Bombardment of Hungarian Cities

On June 26, 1941, five days after the war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union, the Hungarian cities of Kassa, Munkács, Raho, etc., were bombed by unknown planes. The aggressors were not identified. Eye witnesses and written sources gave contrasting opinions. Three generals: the Chief of Staff Henri Werth, Minister of Defense Charles Bartha, and Ambassador of Hungary in Berlin Dominic Sztójay urged aggressive action. The Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defense stated the war would be short, and if they stayed out of it the country would be at a disadvantage regarding Rumania and Slovakia. Three civilian ministers Keresztes Fischer, Bánffy and Vargha opposed a declaration of war.⁴⁷

The Council of Ministers failed before its decision, to order a fact finding examination, although in Kassa there were gendarme and police units, and Budapest was able to send several special investigators.

Despite this, the majority of the Council of Ministers accepted a war against the Soviet Union, and the Regent declared war without the previous approval of the Parliament.

Eastern Battlefields

The next day, the First Quick Army Corps was mobilized and left for the East to take part in the battles. Later they were replaced by the Second Hungarian Army, which was destroyed in the battles at the River Don. After the big defeat in January 1942, the Hungarian Army mainly participated as an occupying force in the Ukraine.

The Corps. of Gendarmerie did not fight in the territory of the Soviet Union. Some of its small units were subordinated to the headquarters of the higher commands where they served as prescribed by the “Service Regulation for the Field Gendarmerie.”

Besides a small number of assigned military gendarmes, every larger army unit organized from its own men “regimental gendarmes,” whose duties were prescribed by their commandants, who in case of necessity, could also use them for military police duties.

Other non professional army units, the “Gendarme Service .Batalions” (which served beyond the battlefields were organized from older reserve soldiers, who guarded railroads, depots, and in case of emergencies, served as military police officers.⁴⁸

Military Search in Bácska

After six months of reoccupation of Bácska by the Hungarians, the communist partisans began sabotaging. Harvested stacks of wheat and hemp were set on fire and farms were burned down in ever larger numbers. They blew up railroad lines and bridges, and even attacked and killed small military and gendarme units.

When the partisans broke up a border guard and gendarme unit near a farm, the Army ordered three battalions under the leadership of military colonel Leslie Deák, to search around the area for partisans. After this, the military commander, Lieutenant General Francis Feketehalmy Cydner concentrated military, gendarme and police forces in the vicinity of the City of Ujvidék, to search for partisans. Suspected persons were screened by a committee, headed by army Brigadier General Joseph Grassy. Those who were sentenced to death were executed by River Forces first lieutenant Gustavus Korompay, who gave an order to cut a hole in the ice of the Danube River and to shoot the prisoners and throw them into the water. Some military truck drivers avoided the screening committee by, taking the assembled persons directly to the Danube where they were executed.⁴⁹

The estimates of the number of victims varied but they were more or less between 1200 to 2900. After an investigation, the Chief of Staff accepted the report of the military commander. The gendarmes had to report the use of their firearms to the military tribunal of the Gendarmerie, who recommended punishment of suspected officers.⁵⁰ The military tribunal of Budapest sentenced four military and one gendarme officer to death and eleven gendarme officers to imprisonment for failing in their supervisory obligations. The Hungarian Parliament voted yearly 12 million Pengos for the victims of Ujvidek.⁵¹

The leaders of the massacre escaped to Germany, but after the war, they were executed in Yugoslavia along with other persons who had cooperated with the Hungarian regime.

The forced performance of illegal military orders of the army generals hurt the reputation of the gendarmerie, whose mission was the enforcement of laws.

Attempt to Prevent Soviet Occupation

As soon as Nicholas Kállay became Prime Minister in March 1942, he contacted the Western Allies in Istanbul through Anthony Ullein Reviczky, a Hungarian diplomat whose father in law was a retired British consul general. According to Kallay:

Our official representative in Istanbul was our consul general Desiderius Ujváry. Veres as an aid was attached to Ujváry for the purpose of the mission. On August 17, 1943, they informed Mr. Sterndale Bennett, the British minister representing the Allies, of Hungary's readiness to surrender to the Allies if Anglo American troops reached the frontiers of Hungary.

The other diplomat of Kállay's was George Bessenyei, a Hungarian minister in Bern, who negotiated with American delegates Royal Troyal Taylor and Allen W. Hules. The Allies suggested, that Hungary should jump out of the war when Italy changes sides and at the moment that the British and American troops are within five hundred miles from our frontiers," We could not undertake to commit a suicide that would have benefited no one.

In the United States Otto Habsburg, who was invited several times to the White House by President Roosevelt and Tibor Eckhardt, representatives of Regent Horthy, were working hard on Hungary's occupation by English and American troops.⁵² Unfortunately they were not successful.

English colonel, Charles Telfer Howie, who escaped from a German POW camp, was being harbored in Hungary. On September 20, 1944, Regent Horthy invited him and Hungarian colonel general, Steve Náday, and authorized them to ask the commander of the English Army fighting in Italy to send English American troops for occupation at least to Western Hungary. The Gendarme were prepared and ready to cooperate with the Western Allies.

Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, commanding officer of the Mediterranean, and general Mark Clark of the 5th American Army wanted to continue the offensive toward the Great Hungarian Plain.

In Italy, they selected Hungarian speaking officers and men for deployment in Hungary. On their uniform was a badge with the Hungarian coat of arm and a "Hungary Magyarország" inscription. However, President Roosevelt forbade execution of this plan, and ordered Clark's divisions to support "Operation Anvil", that is, for landing in South France.⁵³

German Occupation and Deportations

Hitler, on March 15, 1944, invited Horthy for a meeting at Klessheim, where they discussed the withdrawal of the Hungarian army from the Soviet territories. On March 1, the Regent with his Chief of Staff, Minister of Defense, and Secretary of State arrived for private discussions.

Horthy rebuffed Hitler's accusations and the occupation of Hungary. Before the Regent's train returned to Hungary, eleven German divisions occupied Hungary.

With the occupying forces also arrived large "Geheimstadtspolizei" (GESTAPO) and SS units. On the next day, Adolf Eichman, the commandant of "Judendezernat" called together the leaders of the Jewish people and stated that he was the only authority in every Jewish matter in Hungary. He would defend them against everybody, if they would satisfy his requests. He asked discipline and work, for which they would get the same salary as the other workers. All these restrictions would stop at the end of the war.

The promises of Eichhman never were fulfilled. Moreover, he started to put the Jews into concentration camps (ghettos) and then deported them outside of Hungary. “According to the information received up to and including June 20, 1944, 427,000 Jewish people, that is about half of the Hungarian Jews, had to suffer the terrible order of deportation.”⁵⁵

“In the arrangement for deportation, Eichmann followed in Hungary his proven method as he applied all over Europe.”⁵⁶

His troops appeared at the collection centers, at the ghettos and supervised the deportation of Jewish and other non Jewish Hungarians and carried out Eichmann’s tested methods. They made films of the deportation procedures, which were projected in neutral European countries to show the inhumanity of Hungarians and the philanthropical behavior of Germans.⁵⁷ The films failed to reveal the Hungarians were coerced in their actions while the Germans acted by their own free will.

Deployment of the Gendarmes

On August of 1944, the Soviet Army reached the Southeastern border of Hungary. For the defense of the country the Minister of Defense, besides army units, quickly assembled gendarme groups with light armament. Gendarme Lieutenant Colonel Paul Fekete, Captain Tibor Szélevényi and their men were the first Gendarmerie to confront the Russians on the territory of Hungary.

The government used, in large numbers, the gendarme forces at the city of Nagyvárad, in the Northeastern Carpathian Mountains, in Budapest and at Lake Balaton. According to the official estimate, the Corps lost about fifty percent of its officers and enlisted. Their graves are spread all over the country.

After President Roosevelt’s’ order, Regent Horthy sent lieutenant general Gabriel Faragho the Superintendent of the Gendarmerie and his delegates to Moscow and got an armistice from the Allies. On October 15th, he announced his action, but the Arrow Cross Party convinced most of the high ranking staff officers to oppose the armistice and thus sabotaged the terms of the agreement.⁵⁴ The Germans kidnapped Horthy’s only son and forced Horthy to withdraw from affairs of state, They took Horthy and placed him under “protective custody” somewhere in Germany. At the same time, with the help of the fascist Francis Szálasi, leader of the Arrow Cross Party, became the “leader of the nation,” and the war continued against the Soviet Union until the occupation of all of Hungary.

The war for Hungary ended on April 4, 1945 when its last city was occupied by the Soviet Army. Those who feared the Soviet Army and the new communist controlled government, escaped to Austria and Germany. Many immigrated to receptive countries, the others returned to Hungary.

With a new treaty, Hungary lost its territories which it had regained peacefully before the war. In addition, it had to pay a large war reparation to Soviet Russia.

Disbanding of the Gendarmerie

While the war was still on and the Soviet Army was approaching Budapest, a “Provisionary Hungarian National Assembly” was established in the city of Debrecen. On December 21 and 22, 1944, the Assembly, along with other participants, authorized the “Provisional National Government”. The government was set up by one of the Regent’s former generals, the Superintendent of the Gendarmerie and a third army general. It established a centralized law enforcement agency for the whole country.

In March 1945, Prime Minister Béla Miklos publicized his 1960/1946 ME, decree. In it the National Government declared the Hungarian Gendarmerie collectively guilty of crimes and dissolved and disbanded the organization. With this decree, the gendarmes lost their professional jobs, pensions and their right to work in public service, unless they were able to prove at the “Peculiar Justificatory Committee for ex-gendarmes” that they: 1. participated personally and efficiently in the anti-German movement; 2. turned against the Hungarian laws and orders; or 3. gave help to democratic (communist) organizations. The ex-gendarmes appeared in large numbers at the Committee, but only a few were cleared.

VI. Responsibilities

Preface

The role of the Hungarian Gendarmerie in objectionable events and their circumstances may be analyzed solely by the limited reliable sources of the Western World. In the future, after secret documents are made public, a detailed reevaluation will be necessary by scholars, who may determine the advantages and disadvantages of the ex-Hungarian Gendarmerie. The most important and criticized events are the following.

Responsibility of Local Governments

The courts, public prosecutors, leaders of counties and their districts could call on the Gendarmerie for services as determined by the law. In these cases, 24 and 25 year old inexperienced honorary district administrators with a Ph.D. could order to dissolve worker's strikes, or political gatherings by the use of gendarmes, who were then obligated to comply without asking the real reason. Similar problems came up with official actions of executors for overdue taxes and private debts. The local population forgot the initiating plainclothes administrators, but the actions of the uniformed gendarmes remained in their minds.

Responsibility for Military Search

The search of a territory for partisans is the mission of the competent police and gendarme force. This is acknowledged by the fact that the assistant police chief, Joseph Tallian, and the gendarme Lieutenant Colonel, Louis Gaál, were asked by the military leaders for the preparation of a search plan. In spite of this, the Ministers of Defense and Interior ordered a mutual search in the city and its neighborhood of Ujvidék. Three high ranking officers, one lieutenant general, one brigadier general and one colonel, took over the leadership. They had no experiences in the field of searches, mixed together the army, gendarme and police units, without determining exactly the duties and responsibilities of the troops.

When the military leadership ordered "revenge" actions, most gendarme officers, who feared the reaction of the military tribunals, sabotaged the unlawful orders of the generals.

The bloodshed might have been avoided, if: 1. the Minister of Defense and of the Interior, had authorized the police and gendarme units to search and the military to blockade the city, 2. the Superintendent or the district commandant of the Gendarmerie or his deputy had supervised the

execution as a result of the search, 3. at the search, the highest ranking gendarme lieutenant colonel had had enough courage to refuse the cooperation with the Army and report its reason to the Minister of Interior.

After the search, in his departmental order (115.645, eln. 20—942), the Minister of Defense designated the incident to public safety service, in which the gendarme officer is the specialist who has to follow his professional course of action. But the ministerial order did not explain how a gendarme captain or lieutenant colonel could follow the gendarme guidelines for a search if it countermanded the will of a lieutenant general, and then would have to defend himself against the charge of insubordination at a military court.

If the gendarmes and police had been authorized to execute the search without military assistance, there would not have been a massacre.

The responsibility for this shameful affair lay with local army commanders, who not only overreacted to guerrilla harassments, but apparently wished to make an “example” as a deterrent to recurrent guerrilla activities. Later, when the details of the case were learned, the guilty were brought to trial and convicted, four of them to death and the rest to imprisonment.

Responsibility for Deportation

The collection, confiscation of property and deportation of the Jewish people under German direction and supervision, was made by the Hungarian Governmental administration. It happened with the knowledge of the Regent, Council of Ministers, members of the Parliament, law enforcement officers, revenue officers, and almost the whole population of the country. Units of the Army, Gendarmerie, Police, excise officers, county and city administrators, railroad workers, etc. were used in the execution of the “Jewish Laws.”

With the Law of 1367 XVII, the Jewish inhabitants possessed equal rights with the other Hungarian citizens, In spite of this, Eichmann and his SS misled and deceived the Hungarian government as well as the Jewish people, of whom about fifty percent were deported from the country. Their cruel acts were extended to include Hungarian politicians, state and county administrators and even the son of the regent.

The responsibility for this catastrophe is explained by the words of Randolph L. Braham in the following way:

It appears that considerable blame falls on those who might be called onlookers, the Allies and the neutral powers, for their basic indifference to the plight of the Jews, the International Red Cross and the Vatican, for their lack of urgency and insensitivity, and the local Christian population and church authorities for their apathy and passivity. To lesser extent blame must also be shared by the Hungarian and world Jewish leaders for their shortsightedness and bureaucratic/diplomatic tendencies, though their ineffectiveness reflected primarily the

impotence and defenselessness of the Jewish people, Ultimate responsibility, however, must be borne almost exclusively by the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices.

While the Hungarian Jews lived for several years virtually in the shadows of Auschwitz, they had no concrete knowledge about the gas chambers and the mass murders committed in many of the concentration camps.

Unexampled Impeachment

The National Assembly was set up in the partly occupied territory of Hungary, where the neutral and procommunist inhabitants stayed behind. The larger part of population, being pro-German or afraid of the Soviet occupation, escaped to Budapest or the western part of the country, which at that time was in German and Hungarian hands. It is safe to say, this Assembly did not represent the opinion of the majority of the Hungarian people.

On July 8, 1944,. the Regent gave an order to stop any deportation of Jewish people from Hungary. Later he informed the local representatives of Germany, that “military and gendarme units were ordered in the capitol, which in case of necessity , will take up arms against any German deporting attempts.“ On his order a gendarme unit stopped a train near the city of Hatvan, took back 1,500 Jewish deportees to their camp. Gendarme and Police units saved Jewish political prisoners of the Main Street of Budapest from being dragged out of Hungary.They guided the International ghetto against planned Nazi atrocities. /Lévai, op. cit., pp. 205, 184, 207, 256/. Beyond having stopped the deportation, the Gendarmerie did not take any action against the Jewish population.

According to one legal principle, a law can be changed or abrogated only by another law. In spite of this, the Prime Minister, the military ex-colonel general, on the authorization of the Provisionary National Assembly, disbanded the Gendarmerie, which was established by the law of 1881, III. His decree was retroactive, which declared all gendarmes guilty until they were able to prove the betraying of certain laws of the previous regime.

The extremely strict order put every gendarme in the prisoners’ box (dock), expelled them from the “classless society,” and by the exaggerated propaganda ran them down to the level of common criminals.

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration of Human Rights in 1943 and stated: “No one shall be held guilty of any penal offense on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offense, under national or international law, at the time it was committed.”⁶⁰

Epilogue

The gendarme model of law enforcement is a universally accepted institution in Europe. Among these, until the Second World War, the Hungarian Gendarmerie occupied an above average position. The negative incidents of the war period may be partly due to the politics of the state, county and local governments. In addition, the enormous German pressure, unnecessarily extensive military education and training of the officers and enlisted, the non-jurist superintendent of the Gendarmerie making it possible to use the gendarme for the illegal military search of Ujvidek and the deportation of Hungarian citizens.

VII. Notes

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