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Dear friends,

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“I often look at the gendarmerie website and tears come to my eyes when I think of what has become of our beautiful service”. – wrote Sándor Kálmán Vadon, gendarme sergeant, to me in 2008, in a personal letter.

The Hungarian Gendarmerie truly deserves the recognition, as one of the most effective law enforcement organizations in the world. They received law enforcement delegations from Europe and overseas, who came to study their methods and discover the secret of their success. The communist government fiercely persecuted them, and today, still treats them as if they had never existed. Only a very few short term gendarmerie exhibits have taken place over the past 25 years, and the gendarmerie artifacts collected by former gendarmes and donated to Hungary in 2000 still languishes in a museum's warehouse. This is a disgrace. So the fact that the Ópusztaszer National Heritage Park (ÓNTE) will provide a room for a permanent gendarme exhibit is a paradigm shift from the past.

The Park's topic is the life in rural Hungary in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Adding a gendarme garrison room to the exhibit makes the Park historically more accurate, as the gendarme garrisons were an integral part of rural Hungary, and provided the stability necessary for the country's remarkable progress in that time period. Therefore, it is with joy that we welcome the gendarmerie room exhibit, and extend our appreciation to those who are contributing to its creation.

The central director of the Hungarian Gendarme Association (MCSBE), Pál Ságvári, first inquired a number of years ago at Ópusztaszer about establishing a gendarmerie



**The Ópusztaszeri National Heritage Park's gendarme garrison room will be based on old photographs, like this one.**

room. Unfortunately, nothing came of it then, because the political atmosphere in Hungary at that time was not receptive of such a display. Time passed, and the president of the Hungarian Gendarmerie Legacy Association (MKCSHK), István Préda, last year successfully brought about an essential meeting between representatives of Ópusztaszer, the MKCSBK and the historians of SZBMRTT. Thanks be to God, I can now say that the preparation of the exhibit has begun. The room will be in the same building that houses the “townhall”. It will depict life at a gendarme garrison with appropriate furniture reproductions for an office and living quarters. The construction of the furniture is in progress, and is based on original documentations. Dr. Sándor Szakály, gendarmerie historian, recently personally visited the Park to discuss specifics to assure accuracy of the display. Gábor Vincze, the Park’s historian also met with Dr. István Gulyás, owner and proprietor of a touring gendarmerie exhibit. We have been sending pictures, layouts, copies of documents, suggestions for the furniture placements, and advising and answering questions. The wheels are turning, we are moving ahead. Again, I am overcome by the prospect of what is happening. It appears that the room will be ready by this summer.

Because of the historic significance of a permanent gendarmerie exhibit, and to have the opportunity to expose the public to the non-biased truth about the gendarmerie’s faithful service to our homeland, again I appeal to all members, who have not so far made a donation for this very important project, to do so now. The amount of a contribution, no matter how small, is not as important as is the fact that everyone supports the work. If one desires to inform, and to restore the respect of the gendarmerie in a concrete manner, then at least a small symbolic donation ought to be made. I regret to say that as of this time, only 22 families have contributed from our mailing list of nearly 200 (a mere 11%), while at the same time, over 100 requested and received our Commemorative Gendarmerie Medal, which we provided free of charge. Does this accurately reflect of how much the gendarmerie’s cause is taken to heart?

Since our last *Newsletter*, the following have contributed to the cause: Kálmán Beöthy, János Hangodi, Péter Czink, Dalma Pallagi, Dr. István Ravasz, István Bólus, Szabolcs and Judit v. Vattay. We gratefully acknowledge their support.

I recently looked through hundreds of my personal correspondence from over the years with former gendarmes, of whom only one is still alive. Time and time again they wrote thanking me for taking an interest in them, for respecting them, and for valuing their service to our homeland. It is I, who am thankful that I had the privilege to have known them. They served honorably and valiantly, and many paid the ultimate sacrifice for their nation. And what was their reward? They were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, degraded, and many died at the hands of the AVO (secret police). They were and in many ways, and are still, the outcasts, the “lepers” of the nation, yet their love and service for Hungary never died. Where do you find such loyalty today? I only wish more were alive today and could witness what we have been able to accomplish with our website, newsletters, books, and now at Ópusztaszer, as a means of honoring them and saying belatedly, THANK YOU! We haven’t forgotten you.

Among my letters were many from Pál Jegenyés, a master sergeant garrison commander, and founder of the MKCSBK in 1947. I was referred to him to find answers to my questions. He graciously responded in detail to all my inquiries regarding service, equipment and life at the garrison. The compilation of these details are on the website, under the name, *Csendőrélet az őrsön* (Life in the gendarme garrison), in the *Articles Archives* of the Library. At the time, I did not realize how useful these letters will be in planning the gendarmerie room, as much of this information has been lost over the half century of the communist dictatorship.

After the war, the communist propaganda machine effectively spread the lies that the gendarmes were brutal oppressors of the people. The letters mentioned above show the truth to be exactly the opposite. In one of the letters, Sándor Domokos, gendarme 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. gave an account of an incident, which, according to the Karsay letters (see below) was not a unique event. In October of 1956, the Freedom Fight broke out in Hungary. In many locations, the freedom fighters asked locally living gendarmes to be their leaders, due to their experience and military background. The freedom fighters captured many members of the AVO, the dreaded and hated secret police, who were infamous about the most heinous, inhumane interrogations, beatings, torture, and executions of scores of innocent people. Of course, the freedom fighters wanted nothing more than to kill these enemies on the spot. Lt. Domokos, as also other gendarmes, prevented these killings, saying that they need to abide by the law, and surrender the AVO to the proper authorities. One of the guiding principles of the gendarmes was that “The law is behind you, so let it also be before you”, and therefore they upheld the law even under these unusual circumstances. (And then, after the fall of the Revolution, these AVO members brutally persecuted the very same gendarmes who spared their lives).

We have also posted a large volume of Jenő Karsay, gendarme colonel's, correspondence during his tenure as the central director of MKCsBK in 1948-49, and editor of the newsletter (Bajtársi Levél) till 1964. These letters are historically very important, because they give us an insight into the lives, struggles, values and thoughts of the gendarmes, who had to leave Hungary. Karsay entrusted these letters to Dr. József Orbán, a historian and a son of a gendarme. Last year, he scanned these letters for us, which we have now prepared and placed onto the web site, in the *Document Archives* (169 letters total). They clearly reveal the love the gendarmes had for their homeland and for their fellow man, even in those very trying times. We extend our deep appreciation to Dr. József Orbán for these invaluable documents.

As I often browse Vatera, the Hungarian internet auction house, looking for gendarme items, I was dismayed, to say the least, that someone had placed one of our recent MKCsBK Commemorative Medals up for sale. This was not another defective medal of which I wrote about in my last Newsletter, but an original medal, which we created at considerable expense for us, yet presented free of charge to family members and friends of former Hungarian gendarmes. It is disheartening to think that someone is so callus and disrespectful as to seek to make a profit on the memory of the gendarmes by selling that which was presented to them at no expense.

As always, it is my sad duty to report our recent losses: Ágoston István, gendarme, January 4, 2016, Budapest; Edit Poltáry, daughter of Brigadier gendarme General Vilmos Poltáry, February 12, 2016. We extend our deep condolences to their families for this great loss.

With best regards,

  
Zoltán Körössi  
MKCsBK Central Director

*Híven, becsülettel, vitézül*