

**Victor A. Falk**  
**OF**  
**FIRE, IRON AND BLOOD**

VOL. 1.



**A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ROYAL HUNGARIAN  
"HONVÉD" ARMY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

**For this work (in manuscript form)  
the Árpád Academy of the Hungarian Association in Cleveland, OH,  
awarded the author its GOLD MEDAL in 1982.**

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**I dedicate this book to the memory of my father,  
Lt. Col. Viktor Falk  
whose dedication to duty and example in life  
was the inspiration for this book.**





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## INTRODUCTION.

Although much has been written about the Second World War – and these are usually from the point of view of the Allied Powers - very few have appeared in English from the point of view of the smaller nations. This book is to fill that void, and present the events from the Hungarian perspective. Specifically, in this book the author intends to present the role and actions of the Royal Hungarian “*Honvéd*” Army during the Second World War.

Even though this book is in no way intended as a political treatise, in discussing this topic it is often necessary to highlight the political circumstances of an event. The politics are presented only to shed light on the historical setting of Hungary in the mid century.

\* \* \* \* \*

To understand the history leading up to World War II, it is necessary to examine the events arising from World War I.

Prior to World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire consisted of Germanic, Hungarian, (Magyar), Romanian and Slavic peoples, comprising a strong, prosperous political and economic union, which provided a firm power balance in Europe between Germany and Russia. When the territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were partitioned and made into seven separate countries by the 1920 Paris Peace Conference, this power balance was totally destroyed. The ensuing small countries created in the spirit of self determination were unable to decide their own destiny in the shadow of the new emerging powers of Europe: the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.. These small countries were continuously either intimidated by one, victimized by the other, or very often played out against each other, so that the spirit of self determination became only an ideal, but never a reality. Briefly, this was the role of these countries in the Second World War, whether or not they realized it at that time.

Further, in order to appreciate Hungary's role in the Second World War, one must know the intent of her government under the constraints of the different phases of the War.

The war in Eastern Europe broke out as early as 1939. Regent Horthy and his advisors were always of the opinion, that the Third Reich could score only temporary victories and could not defeat the combined industrial and military might of the Western powers. After the invasion of Poland in 1939 it became obvious moreover, that the Western Powers could not offer military help to land locked Hungary either, in a case of open conflict with the Third Reich. On the other hand, Hungary having had a short taste of communist rule in 1919, wanted no part of same, nor wished to contemplate any domination by the Soviet Union. Consequently, the government's intention was to preserve Hungary's neutrality. This was successfully achieved and maintained until 1941.

After the events of 1941, the government tried to keep Hungary from becoming the battleground between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union - the two opposing giants - and at the same time avoid an occupation by either power. It was able to accomplish this objective until 1944.

In the last phase of the war, Hungary's intention was to repulse or at least to retard the oncoming Soviet invasion, in the hope that she would be able to avoid the horrors of Soviet occupation and the perils of Soviet Communism. By this delaying action Hungary hoped to allow time for a victory of the Western Allied Powers, whose hoped for plans to mount an offensive north through the Balkans were viewed as a possible escape from Soviet occupation. Unfortunately, decisions made at the Tehran Conference in 1943 dashed these hopes. Hungary was, at this point inextricably forced onto the path of destruction. Despite her desperate efforts, tiny Hungary could not be the master of her own destiny.

In the following chapters it is the intent of the author to give credit to those men who have suffered and sacrificed their lives in this valiant defense of their homeland. It is a testimonial to their unquestioning patriotism and obedience to the orders of their superiors.



**Vice-Admiral vitéz Miklós nagybányai Horthy**  
**Regent of Hungary 1920-1944**  
**Lord Commander of the Armed Forces**

## PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE.

### 1. THE SHAMBLES OF WORLD WAR I

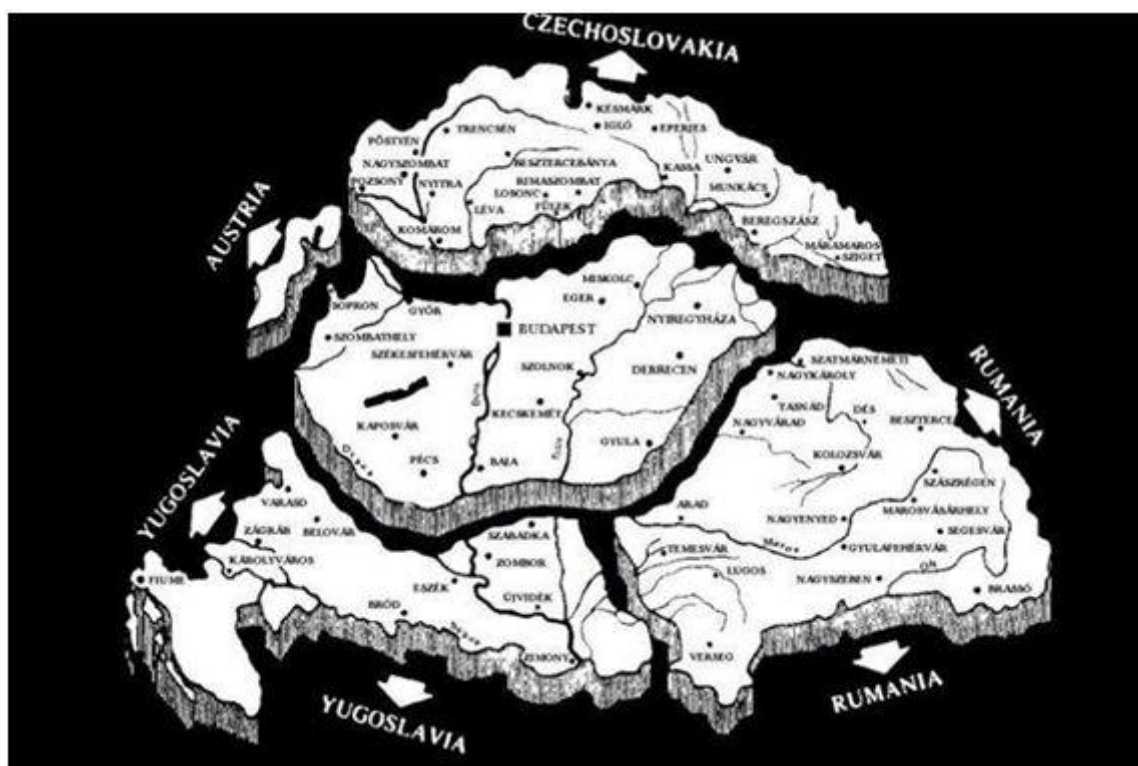
**How the homeland lost the war, while the men on the battlefield stood fast.**

In October, 1918 the armies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire stood undefeated many hundreds of miles away from the borders of Hungary; In the East by the Sea of Azov, between the Donets and Dnieper Rivers the South deep in Bosnia to the West in Northern Italy and on the, Eastern frontier a peace treaty was being signed with Romania. **There were no enemy troops anywhere on Hungarian land.** Although the army fared well on the battlefields, the home-land grew weary of the war and in a political turmoil wanted peace.

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Austria-Hungary signed an armistice in Padua with the Entente. There was no mention whatsoever of territorial changes to Hungary. In the meantime count Mihály Károlyi's Party of Independence came in to power and proposed that Hungary should sever her 400 years connection with the Habsburg Dynasty, Austria, and should conclude a separate peace treaty with the Allies. To show good faith, the pacifist Károlyi government ordered all troops to lay down their arms. This order made the Hungarian soldier a defenseless "de facto" prisoner of war. Béla (Adalbert) Lindner, war minister of this government pronounced his now infamous words: "*Soha többé nem akarok katonát látni*" that is: "I never want to see another soldier again."

Thus, he made the fatal mistake of disbanding the army, and leaving Hungary defenseless to the greed of her hostile neighbors. Károlyi then went to Belgrade to ask the French allied commander, General Franchet d'Esperey for a separate armistice. It was at this time that the French general spoke these memorable words: "*Vous etes deja tombe si bas?*" (This is how low you have fallen already?) Károlyi found out with amazement that through long standing secret agreement the Allies were honoring the territorial aspirations of Hungary's neighbors for Hungarian land. The demarcation lines drawn by d'Esperey allowed Serb and Romanian troops to occupy all of southern and eastern Hungary, followed by Czech troops entering Northern Hungary. On November 13<sup>th</sup> King Charles renounced his participation in the affairs of the state and Károlyi was proclaimed president of the Republic. But what a Republic - a country without an army and hostile troops occupying her territories! **The attempt of a separate armistice has backfired!** On March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the Allied commander ordered Károlyi to evacuate further areas of central Hungary for the benefit of the Romanians. In its desperation the Károlyi government resigned. The political climate became ripe for Béla Kun's communist party to proclaim the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Kun Government tried to reorganize the remaining troops into a "Red Army" with the aid of Col. Aurel Stromfeld, then conducted some successful operations against the advancing Czechs. The Hungarian troops however became quickly demoralized due to the internal conditions of the country. News traveled quickly of the communist terror, which reigned in the parts of Hungary not occupied by foreign forces. Innocent people were tortured and executed as "enemy agents" or "enemies of the proletariat". Tibor Szamuely became the chief of the "Hungarian Cheka". His notorious "death train" traveling through the countryside left torturous scenes: people hanging from trees, mutilated corpses and blood flowing from the third class cars of death train. The horror of this regime was so great, that many places the inhabitants were relieved to see the advancing Romanians. The resistance of the disorganized and undisciplined Red Army soon melted away, thus allowing the Romanian forces to advance further into Central Hungary, even reaching Budapest.

## PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE



### Partition of the territory of Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

The Peace Treaty of Trianon has deprived Hungary of 71.4% of its original territory of 325,411 km<sup>2</sup> (125,642 mi<sup>2</sup>):

- To Romania – 103,093 km<sup>2</sup> (39,804 mi<sup>2</sup>)
- To Yugoslavia – 63,083 km<sup>2</sup> (24,356 mi<sup>2</sup>)
- To Czechoslovakia – 61,578 km<sup>2</sup> (23,775 mi<sup>2</sup>)
- To Austria – 3,972 km<sup>2</sup> (1,534 mi<sup>2</sup>)
- To Poland – 589 km<sup>2</sup> (227 mi<sup>2</sup>)
- To Italy – 21 km<sup>2</sup> (8.1 mi<sup>2</sup>)

### Partition of Hungary's population.<sup>2</sup>

The Peace Treaty of Trianon has taken 64% of Hungary's original population of 20,886,000 (including Croatia) and placed it under foreign rule:

- To Romania – 5,265,000
- To Yugoslavia – 4,122,000
- To Czechoslovakia – 3,576,000
- To Austria – 200,000
- To Poland and Italy – 207,000

leaving a mere 7,516,000 people in truncated Hungary.

<sup>1</sup> Data derived from: *A.T.I Kiszatlasz* – Magyar Királyi Térképészeti Intézet, Budapest, 1934

<sup>2</sup> Ref: <http://www.trianon.hu/keret.phtml?/trianon/triautan/trut1/trut16/>



The Peace Treaty of Trianon is more cruel than any other Peace Treaty.



The peace treaty of Versailles has taken away one of every twenty german-speaking germans.



The peace treaty of Neuilly has torn away one of every twenty bulgarian-speaking bulgarians.



The peace treaty of Trianon has torn away seven of every twenty hungarians of magyar tongue.



This illustrates the relative armament of the hostile neighbours as compared with disarmed Hungary.

#### The Hungarian army of Trianon.

According to the Treaty of Trianon the Hungarian Army numbers 35.000 in peace and war alike.

By contrast the peace numbers of the countries hostile to Hungary are:

Czechoslovakia . . . 160.000 men

Rumania . . . . . 232.000 men

Yugoslavia . . . . . 150.000 men

Total: 542.000 men

But only in peace time! In the case of mobilisation the combined armies of the three countries aggregate nearly four and a half millions

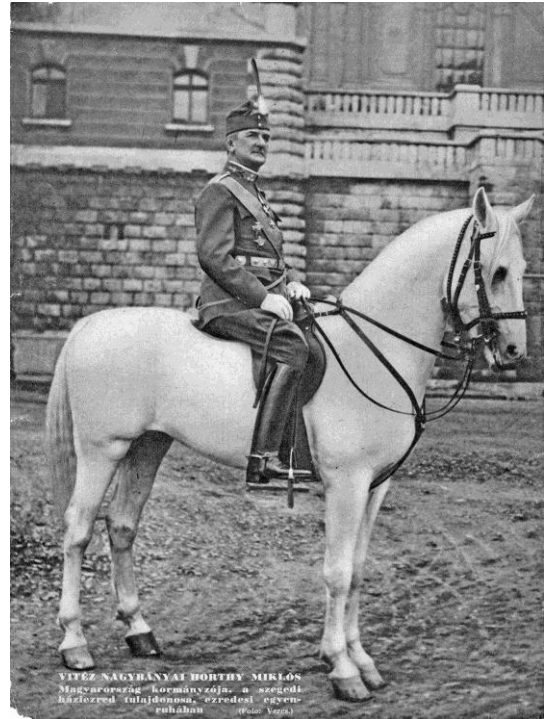
PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE



## **2. THE NATIONAL ARMY**

There were several unsuccessful attempts at restoring law and order in the unoccupied parts of Hungary, but these attempts brought on terrible reprisals from the “Lenin Boys”. One of the most significant attempt to oust the communist regime took place in Budapest on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1919. Under the initiative of Capt. Lemberkovics, the officers of the artillery units of the Vilmos Barracks, the Ludovika Military Academy under the command of Maj. Bartha, and a few gun boats on the Danube were involved in this ill fated attempt. Only the strong intervention of Col. Romanelli, the Italian member to the allied military commission saved the lives of the participants.

Finally, a successful operation against the Red Army took place, on May 7<sup>th</sup> at the City of Szeged. Seventy-two army officers secretly gathered here under the command of Capt. Gyula Gömbös and in a surprise attack disarmed the “Red Guard” in the “Mars Barracks” as well in other military installations of the city. The communist commissars were arrested , and “Gömbös officers” took command of the troops. Within a short while, the troops were rearmed and sworn into the new “Hungarian National Army”. In the next few days, more than 6,000 men voluntarily joined the reformed military.



**Miklós nagybányai Horthy, head of the National Army in his colonel's uniform**

Concurrently, on the political front, two new non-communist governments were formed, one in Budapest, and one in Szeged. Both proceeded to appoint Admiral Miklós Horthy, the last fleet commander of the Austro-Hungarian Navy and the naval hero of the sea battle of Otranto to be the Commander in Chief of the new military. (Horthy was one of the highest ranking Hungarian born officer of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces.)

Horthy assumed command of the troops at Szeged. In the meantime, the Romanians advanced far enough to occupy Budapest and some of the forward element crossed the Danube into Transdanubia. Horthy immediately responded by ordering his troops to move out of Szeged into Transdanubia, undetected through a narrow corridor along the demarcation line between the Romanian and Serbian troops. During this operation in a daring attempt, Horthy flew ahead of his troops accompanied only by his military aid, Maj. Magasházy, to the town of Siófok to Red Army headquarters. In a decisive and firm way, Horthy simply took command at headquarters upon which the communist commissars fled. Throughout Transdanubia the troops were taken over by regular army officers, the red commissars were routed, most often without any bloodshed. The disorderly red troops were swiftly transformed into well disciplined National Army units and law and order was restored everywhere. Shortly, Horthy commanded nearly a 10,000 strong armed force.

Horthy, now recognized as the leading figure, was invited to Budapest to negotiate with the Allied military mission and with the Romanian occupational commander, Gen. Mardaescu. Horthy proposed a new demarcation line and to halt immediately any further Romanian advance. Mardaescu responded with an arrogant question: “What happens if we don't respect the new demarcation line?” Horthy's reply was a very pragmatic one: “Then we shall commence firing!” In actuality Horthy was bluffing, for the National Army had hardly enough ammunition to fight a one

## PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE



day battle, but the bluff worked and the Romanian advance was halted.

After further negotiations the Romanians began to evacuate to the River Tisza and in the second phase, to the earlier “d'Esperey Line.” (No one thought that this temporary line would be future border of the country.)

At the same time the National Army became the nucleus of the “Royal Honvéd Armed Forces”. On March 1, 1920 Admiral Horthy was elected by the National Assembly Regent of Hungary, Lord Commander of the Armed Forces.



**Miklós nagybányai Horthy in his admiral's uniform leads the National Army in a triumphant entry to Budapest on Nov 16, 1919.**

### **3. THE SHACKLES OF TRIANON.**

Since the time of the Károlyi Government, Hungary was only in the state of armistice with the allies. Peace was not yet formally declared and negotiations were being conducted near Paris at Versailles. On January 15, 1920, Hungary was given the terms of the peace treaty. Its terms were beyond the most pessimistic expectations. The Hungarian delegation led by Count Apponyi, replied with great accuracy to all of its points, but in vain. The edict, which in fact constituted the death warrant of the thousand year historic Hungary, had to be signed on June 4<sup>th</sup> at the Trianon Palace of the Versailles.



**Count Albert Apponyi**

Upon the persuasion of some Czech diplomats, (Benes and others) the Western Allies had accepted the view that the principle of “*self determination*” called for the “liberation” of all non-Hungarian (non-Magyar) national minorities but at the same time completely disregarding the rights of the Hungarian population on these areas. While Hungary was partitioned up in the name of “self determination” the Hungarian delegation's request for plebiscite had been repeatedly denied except in the case of one single city, Sopron.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, not only the right of self determination was denied to the Hungarians, but the cultural, historical, geopolitical and economic aspects of these areas and of the entire Carpathian Basin were completely ignored. As a matter of fact, President Wilson, a strong advocate of the idea of self determination, found the terms of the treaty so atrocious, that the US never signed the “Trianon Edict”. To signify its disapproval the

US concluded a separate peace treaty with Hungary on August 29, 1920.

Years later, Paul Doumer, the president of the French senate pronounced his famous words: “Poor Hungary, to which we've been so unjust”.

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<sup>3</sup> The city with an overwhelming majority decided to remain with Hungary.

#### **4. THE SHACKLES FALL OFF.**

For 18 years Hungary remained in the Shackles of Trianon - as it is today - but events in Europe changed the power balance. In 1937 Germany united with Austria, called the "Anschluss". It was a direct consequence of the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Czechoslovakia's attention now turned toward Germany. The Czechs wanted to ease the tensions on their southern borders with Hungary. Consequently, negotiations opened in 1938 between Czechoslovakia and Hungary to rectify the gross injustice of Trianon. It was the intention of the Hungarian government for 18 years following the Trianon peace edict peacefully to revise the situation with the succeeding states. After long negotiations, the First Vienna Accord was reached, on Nov. 2, 1938, whereas Czechoslovakia agreed to return to Hungary some of the most heavily populated Hungarian territories. Also in the same year, the Conference of Bled recognized Hungary's right to a military defense.



**Call to Arms!**

The reoccupation of the area was not an easy task for the Hungarian Army, that was shackled for 18 years but the enthusiasm overcame all obstacles. World War I. veterans without induction notices volunteered at the locations for military duty. The days which followed, were the most beautiful and unforgettable days for all involved, for both the liberators and the liberated. Along the roads in the villages, in the cities, cheering thousands greeted the marching columns with flowers kisses and jubilant tears. Regent Horthy himself led the troops into the historical cities of Komárom and Kassa. The jubilant rejoicing could not be contained only in the areas involved, but swept through the entire nation.



**Captured Czechoslovak bunker in the NE Carpathians**

In 1939, Czechoslovakia fell to the Germans without a single shot fired. The Northern part of historic Hungary, which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia by the "Peace Edict of Trianon" was now declared an independent Slovak state under the protection of the German "Reich". Hungary served notice to the new Slovak government that her forces will occupy the Northeastern Carpathians (*Kárpátalja*) not populated by Slovaks, but by Hungarians and Ruthenians.

The occupation was executed by the VIII Corps commanded by Gen. Major Alajos

Béldy. Commencing on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1939, the cavalry and mechanized units of the Corps quickly moved through the river valleys breaking down the spurious partisan resistance and reached the borders of historic Hungary in four days. On the old Hungarian - Polish border Hungarian and Polish troops met jubilantly embracing one another. The follow up troops of the Corps found no resistance anywhere, and were greeted everywhere by happily cheering crowds.

In the Ruthenian villages the troops were often presented with bread and salt, an Ancient Ruthenian custom of welcoming a friend.

## PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE

During the operations in the Northeastern Carpathians, Romania mobilized and concentrated her troops on the Hungarian border. Because border incidents became very frequent between Romanian troops and Hungarian Border Guards, Hungary ordered partial mobilization also. In spite of all these events, the Hungarian government was still looking for ways to achieve a peaceful revision to the “Trianon Peace Edict”. The “Second Vienna Agreement” was born on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1940 with Germany and Italy acting as impartial judges. Accordingly, Romania agreed to return the northern heavily Hungarian populated areas, approximately 50,000 km<sup>2</sup> of former Eastern Hungary, known as Transylvania. This was almost half of the original area taken by Romania in 1920.

The Hungarian troops crossed the “Trianon border” on September 5<sup>th</sup> 1940, and the sentiments of 1938 were once again relived or, if possible, even surpassed. Jubilant and cheering crowds lined the roads and streets by the thousands everywhere, greeting the marching columns with banners, flags, and joyful tears. Regent Horthy again personally led his troops into the cities of Szatmárnémeti, Nagyvárad, Kolozsvár, and Marosvásárhely. By September 13<sup>th</sup>, the troops reached the boundaries of historical Hungary on the peaks of the Eastern Carpathians and the return of Northern Transylvania was completed.



Flowers and banners greet the troops everywhere





PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE



Regent Horthy making a triumphant entrance in Komárom, Kassa and Szatmárnémeti

PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE



Regent Horthy making an address to a welcoming crowd in Kolozsvár, Transylvania.



Welcoming crowds somewhere in Transylvania

PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE



Welcoming crowds greet the troops everywhere





## 5. THE PERILS OF WAR MOVE CLOSER

### The choiceless choice and the tragedy of prime minister Teleki.

The hostilities that broke out on Oct. 28, 1940, between Greek and Italian forces on the Albanian - Greek border upset the delicate situation on the Balkan. Since Italy was an ally of Germany, the Third Reich showed great Concern, but the German forces were separated from their ally by two neutral countries, Hungary and Yugoslavia. The possibility of German intervention became probable when the military initiative eventually passed to the Greeks.



Prime Minister count Pál  
Teleki

Hungary's minister president, Count Pál Teleki, made every effort to keep Hungary neutral without losing sight of Hungary's intent of a peaceful Revision of "Trianon", which had not yet been brought up with Yugoslavia. To ease tensions, the Hungarian government signed a friendship treaty with the government of premier Cvetkovich of Yugoslavia on Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1940. These overtures however were quickly stifled in March, 1941 by the military coup of General Simkovich, who had Cvetkovich assassinated and took over power in Belgrade. With his chauvinistic policies toward the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia, Simkovich soured the previous relationship.

The German - Yugoslav relationship also deteriorated with the new Yugoslav government. The Third Reich wanted to mount a military offensive against Yugoslavia, mainly from the Romanian - Yugoslavian border. To reach their staging areas in Romania the German troops would have to move through Hungary. Minister President Teleki wanted to preserve the country's neutrality above all, but General Henrik Werth, the Chief of the General Staff informed the government that here was no chance the Hungarian army could stop a German invasion, for any extended period of time. In the case of hostilities Hungary would become a battleground. Considering the eight to one numerical superiority of the German forces and the striking differences in equipment of the armies, General Werth's appraisal of the situation was correct. The General staff had to consider also the possibility of Slovakian and Romanian troops attacking simultaneously as allies of Germany.



Gen. Henrik Werth

In his agony over the situation Minister President Teleki committed suicide on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. In his suicide note to Regent Horthy he wrote:

*"Perhaps, with my death I may do a last service for my country"*

A few days later Winston Churchill, in a radio address announced that there would be a chair for Count Teleki at the peace conference. (In Paris in 1947 there was no chair for Count Teleki and no one remembered him and the shackles of Trianon were repeated again. But, regardless what happened in Paris, this unselfish honest man will not be forgotten in the true history of Hungary. )

On April 6<sup>th</sup> the German troops opened their offensive on three fronts against the Yugoslav forces. On April 7<sup>th</sup>, probably as a retaliation to the German troop movements, Yugoslav war planes bombed the railroad stations at the following Hungarian towns: Szeged, Pécs, Villány, Kőrmend, and Siklós. On April 10<sup>th</sup> the dissolution of Yugoslavia was declared in Zagreb. In the meanwhile, disturbing reports of anarchy and chaos breaking out in the battle zones of Yugoslavia were circulated, and news came of atrocities committed by Serbian *chetniks* (guerillas) against the Hungarian

population in the region of Bácska.<sup>4</sup>

These momentous events – the German invasion of Yugoslavia, and the consequent dissolution of that country into Serbia and Croatia - opened up the enticing possibility of regaining some of the southern territories lost at Trianon. Hungarian military leadership convinced the Regent to take up the German offer and occupy the Bácska region and to protect the Hungarian population of the Bácska area. This German concession was the repayment for Hungary allowing their occupation forces to march through Hungary. Consequently, elements of the Hungarian Army crossed the “Trianon” border on April 11<sup>th</sup>.

The Mobile Corps, the III and V Corps took part in the operation. The most significant action took place on April 13<sup>th</sup> at the village of Petrőcz in the vicinity of the city of Zombor, where the 1<sup>st</sup> Mechanized Brigade of the Mobile Corps ran into some stiff opposition. After breaking the resistance of the enemy they took 50 officers and 3500 enlisted men as prisoners of war and captured



**Hungarian troops entering Zombor (Sombor)**

20 artillery pieces 13 antitank guns and 4 vehicles. The Hungarian losses consisted of 6 dead and 32 wounded. Elsewhere, the resistance of the Yugoslavian troops was spurious and relatively disorganized. By April 14<sup>th</sup> the Hungarian forces reached their objectives everywhere, namely, the Dráva and Danube rivers and occupation was completed and law and order was restored to the Bácska.

The advancing troops were greeted by happy crowd, banners and flowers in the old

Hungarian cities of Szabadka (Subotica), Zombor (Sombor) and Újvidék (Novi Sad).

A complete and honest history cannot be told without including the unfortunate and terrible events that occurred in Újvidék (Novi Sad) a year into the administration of the new territory. During this year, guerilla activities increased and some gendarme and military forces were dispatched to control the situation in Jan of 1942. Tragically, their unrestrained response to some sniping activity in Újvidék led to one of the worst abuses of power leading to uncalled for atrocities and executions. Some 18 lower and high-ranking officers were subsequently indicted and sentenced by the Hungarian military court, but the detained officers managed to escape into German custody, and joined the Waffen-SS. After the communist takeover, the Hungarian People's Court reaffirmed these sentences and those who could be recaptured were extradited to Yugoslavia - upon Tito's insistence - where they were sadistically executed by torture, hanging or firing squads. In addition, tens of thousands of Hungarian national civilians were massacred in Bácska, in a massive reprisal in 1945, which to this day the Yugoslav or successor Serbian government has not acknowledged, let alone apologized for.

The return of the southern region of Bácska to mother Hungary was the last act of fulfilling the dream of those who yearned for a revision of the infamous Trianon Treaty. At the same time this foray was the first incident of this period where the Hungarian military was forced into a shooting conflict. Prisoners were taken, casualties were suffered. This was the time when ominous and gaping holes were discovered in the Army's preparedness, fitness and actual field experience. Even if top leadership did recognize these danger signs, there was nothing much they could do about it. The country had already started its inevitable slide into the awaiting abyss.

<sup>4</sup> Bácska: The portion of Southern Hungary bounded by the Rivers Danube and Tisza.

PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE



Troops arriving in Újvidék (Novi Sad)

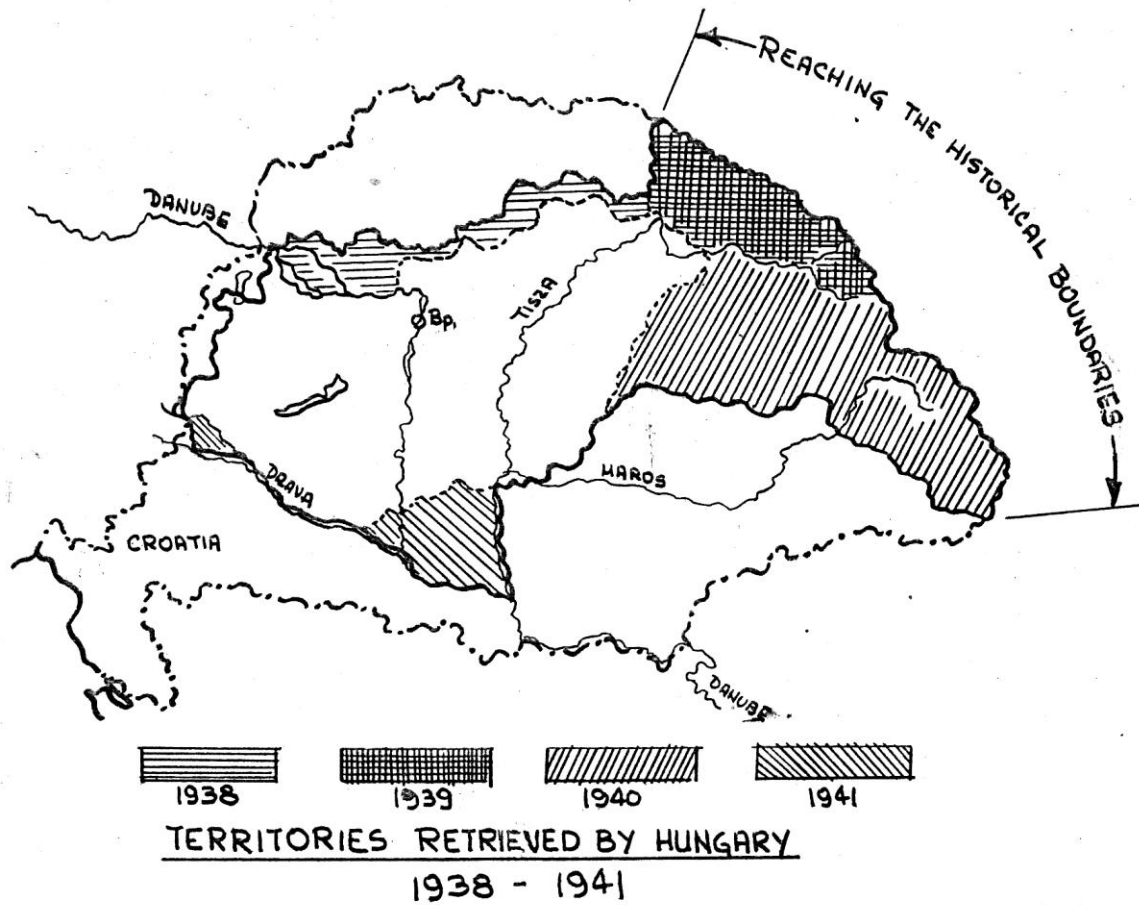


Street skirmish in Zombor (Sombor)



Yugoslav prisoners being marched to POW camp





**Territories regained by Hungary.**

In 1938 from Czechoslovakia 11,927 km<sup>2</sup> (4,605 mi<sup>2</sup>) in Upper Territories (*Felvidék*)

In 1939 from Slovakia 10,700 km<sup>2</sup> (4,131 mi<sup>2</sup>) in NE Territories (*Kárpátalja*)

In 1940 from Romania 43,591 km<sup>2</sup> (16,831 mi<sup>2</sup>) in northern Transylvania (*Észak Erdély*)

In 1941 from Serbia 11,601 km<sup>2</sup> (4,479 mi<sup>2</sup>) in Voivodina (*Bácska*)

*All in all, Hungary's territory increased by 77,819 km<sup>2</sup> (30,046 mi<sup>2</sup>) (from 93,075 km<sup>2</sup> to 170,894 km<sup>2</sup>) to a total of 170,894 km<sup>2</sup> (65,983 mi<sup>2</sup>), back to 53.5% of its pre 1920 size.*

**Population regained by Hungary.**

In 1938 from Czechoslovakia 862,000 in Upper Territories (*Felvidék*)

In 1939 from Slovakia 550,000 in NE Territories (*Kárpátalja*)

In 1940 from Romania 2,186,000 in northern Transylvania (*Észak Erdély*)

In 1941 from Serbia 1,145,000 in Voivodina (*Bácska*)

*All in all, Hungary's population increased by 4,743,000, to a total of 12,259,000, back to 58.7% of its pre 1920 size.<sup>5</sup>*

The return of these territories to mother Hungary was a culmination of a political and policymaking struggle of over 20 years, to redress the injustice of placing millions of Hungarians under foreign rule. These gains brought great euphoria despite these perilous years, fulfilling the dream of those who yearned for a revision of the infamous Trianon Treaty. To many, it seemed to justify the very risky alliances the government was forced to undertake to achieve it.

<sup>5</sup> Ref: <http://www.trianon.hu/keret.phtml?/trianon/triautan/trut1/trut16/>

**6. KASSA. THE “PEARL HARBOR” OF HUNGARY.**

The confrontation between the Soviet Union and the Third Reich was not as unexpected as most students of history think today. After the partition of Poland in 1939, the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina and the absorption of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia had made the Third Reich, and in fact entire Eastern Europe uneasy about the Soviet Union.

As early as August, 1940, the OKH<sup>6</sup> issued a directive, “Operation Aufbau Ost” (Operation Build up East), to build up German military strength on the eastern border. The German General Staff under the direction of Gen. Franz Halder began working out plans for an offensive against Russia code named “Operation Barbarossa”. The situation had remained dormant, however, until November of that year when Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov visited Berlin. At that time it became known that the Russians objected to the German military presence in Romania and Finland, they desired a Soviet Naval base within the range of the Bosphorus and suggested to take Bulgaria under their “protection”. It was evident from that point on that the two powers were on a collision course. It was only a matter of time until armed conflict. The Russians anticipated the conflict as well as the Germans, since the Soviet Union had the largest standing army of the world at that time, and most of it was concentrated on their Western border.

The Soviets had twelve armies and numerous tank troops stationed along their borders toward the west organized into five military districts.

These were: Leningrad H.Q. Leningrad, Baltic H.Q. Riga, Western H.Q. Minsk, Kiev H.Q. Kiev and Odessa H.Q. Odessa.

On the Russian-Hungarian border along the Carpathians the 26<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army stood with 8 divisions and 2 tank brigades under the command of Gen. Kostanko. This of course strained Hungarian Russian relations as well. As the Hungarian government was alarmed by the Russian build up along the border, it mobilized an equivalent strength of two divisions, codenamed “Carpath Group” under the command of Lt. Field Marshal Szombathelyi, and placed these units along the border also.

Size wise the Red Army was the mightiest and unequalled, and its equipment was lavish. In fact it had more tanks and as many aircraft as the rest of the world put together. In general however, the Russian army was thought of as being poorly trained and led by incompetent officers. It was a well known fact that during the 1934-38 purges Stalin had eliminated most of the qualified and experienced military leaders. On his orders all eleven of the military district commanders were executed, thirteen out of fifteen army commanders, and fifty seven out of eighty five Corps commanders, 195 out of 220 division commanders<sup>7</sup> and an enormous number of other officers.

Although smaller in size, the Wehrmacht had an impeccable battle record so far, and the German political leaders believed that a quick “Blitzkrieg” type victory would be achieved in Russia as well. Consequently, both powers anticipated a clash of arms, but the Soviets estimated it for 1943, while the German decision was to strike in 1941, not allowing the Russians any further build up. It is true that the Balkan campaign delayed the German plans somewhat but most of the German leadership was confident that a decisive military victory would be achieved before the Russian winter set in.

Romania's dictator Marshal Antonescu enjoyed Hitler's complete confidence and was well informed of the “Barbarossa” plans, while Regent Horthy and Hungary was mistrusted by Hitler. Consequently, “Barbarossa” included the deployment of Romanian troops, but did not mention at all any Hungarian participation. The Romanian government was very eager to cooperate and fulfill German expectations in the hope that the issue of Northern Transylvania would be reopened again in their favor, so the Romanians mobilized 16 divisions, (approx. 350,00 troops) to join the invasion

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<sup>6</sup> OKH: The German High Command (Ober Kommando des Heeres)

<sup>7</sup> Ref. Alan Clark: *Barbarossa*. William Morrow and Co. 1965. pg. 31



of the Soviet Union.

On June 22, 1941 the German forces began their offensive along the Russian-German demarcation line in divided Poland. On the same day both Hungary's neighbors, Slovakia and Romania declared war on the Soviet Union, while Hungary was content to break off diplomatic relations with Moscow. On the next day the Romanians begun their hostilities along the Russian Romanian border. On that day Hitler made it known that if Hungarian forces do not participate in the campaign, Germany would reopen the Northern Transylvania issue in favor of Romania.

In spite of all this, Minister President Bárdossy (Teleki's successor) and his cabinet decided against military intervention. In a letter to Hitler, Regent Horthy stressed that Hungary had no "Casus Belli" that is, reason for war with the Soviet Union. Quickly evolving events, however, changed Hungary's destiny.

Four days later, on June 2, two unidentified aircraft at 12:45 PM strafed a passenger train on



Observers described these type of aircraft

the Kőrösmező-Budapest line, in the vicinity of villages of Rahó and Tiszaborkút, causing one death and 9 injuries. On the same day at 13:08 PM three unidentified aircraft dropped 30 100 kg. bombs on the city of Kassa (Kosice) killing 32 and injuring 283 people and causing heavy damage.<sup>8</sup> The insignia of the Leningrad Soviet Ammunition Works was discovered on one of the bomb fragments, and two of the bombs were duds. Before disposing them these bombs had been photographed and the pictures had been sent to Budapest to the General Staff for identification. Based on the available evidence it was concluded that both incidents were

committed by Soviet aircraft and Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union on June 27, 1941.

Since the end of the war, much controversy has surrounded the bombing incident of Kassa, as to who was responsible for the bombing. It is beyond the scope of this book to pass final judgment on the subject matter, nevertheless, an attempt shall be made briefly to examine the different possibilities to come to some opinion.

After the war in Soviet occupied Hungary the communist historians (since these were the only ones permitted to exist) concluded that the bombing was committed by Germans to trick Hungary in to the war, some even suggested that General Werth and the top Hungarian military leadership collaborated with the Germans to produce the incident. Contrary to the Russian supposition, however none of the Western researchers could find anything in captured German documentation, which would indicate that to be case and the Russian war documentation is still inaccessible to Westerners. Furthermore the technical details of the bombing make this supposition very unlikely.



Devastation caused by the bombs

By examining the bomb craters and the two duds it was established that the bombs were of the 100 kg. size. The Luftwaffe's arsenal, however did not include 100 kg. bombs their bombs were of 50, 250, and 500 kg. sizes. Therefore it is beyond any doubt that the bombs were not of German origin even if someone had to fake the Russian Cyrillic inscription on them. An amateur may argue nevertheless that these bombs could have been captured Russian bombs, since the Germans cap-

<sup>8</sup> Ref. Adonyi: "A Magyar Katona a II. Világháborúban" ("The Hungarian Soldier in WWII") Collegial Society of Hungarian Veterans, Klagenfurt 1954. Pg. 83.

tured an enormous amount of military materiel during the first few days of the war. A closer examination however, shows that it is nearly impossible and very dangerous to carry 100 kg. bombs in a bomb compartment designed for 50 or 250 kg. bombs. According to all available records the Luftwaffe's bombers (such as the Ju-88 the Ju-86, the HE-111 and the DO-17) were designed to carry only German made bombs.<sup>9</sup> As a result it can be concluded that it would have been an impossibility for 3 German bombers of any type to drop 30 Russian made bombs on Kassa. Thus the only way to put the blame on the German would be to assume that they not only captured Russian bombs, but also flyable aircraft as well, and that German pilots had learned to fly them in less than four days.

There is more negative evidence however on the German involvement:

After the war Gen. Fütterer, the German military air attaché to Hungary, at the time of the Kassa incident, had been interrogated at the Nürnberg trials and later in Budapest by the Communist Political Police (the ÁVO). After the interrogation at Budapest, the Political Police had to return Gen. Fütterer without raising any charges against him.

Undoubtedly the Hungarian Government was under heavy pressure by the Germans to enter the war, but as a final conclusion one can categorically state that in the summer of 1941 German military might was at its zenith and if the Germans had wanted to they could have forced their way on Hungary.

Another version of the Kassa bombing incident is that they were defecting Slovak Bombers to the Soviet Union. These fliers en route had dropped their loads over Kassa expressing their anti Hungarian sentiment. It is true that there were some Slovak defection attempts to the Soviet Union, most of which failed. Nevertheless, the story from that point of view is plausible, but the technical details are murky.

A year before its disintegration in 1939 Czechoslovakia purchased 51 bombers from the Soviet Union, and also the license to build these planes, which were designated by the Czechoslovaks as the B-71 aircraft. Each of these planes was capable of carrying 6 pieces of 100 kg. Russian made bombs.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the Czechoslovak arsenal included 100 kg. bombs as well. At the collapse of Czechoslovakia all of these planes were captured by the Germans and most of them were retained in Bohemia, where the Luftwaffe used them for training purposes Some had been sold to Bulgaria and a few were given to the new Slovak air force.

As it was established that 3 aircraft had dropped 30 pieces of 100 kg. bombs on Kassa, these could not have been Slovak B-71s since 3 of this type aircraft could have dropped only a total of 18 bombs on the city. As another possibility due to its geographic location Hungary's other neighbor, Romania, could be considered as a suspect for the bombing incident without getting into technical details this possibility should be discarded for logical reasons.

The purpose of Romania's enthusiastic involvement in the Russian campaign was to gain Hitler's favor at the expense of the Hungarians. Therefore it would have been contrary to the Romanian government's aims to trick Hungary into the war on Germany's side. Last but not least one must consider the case of Soviet bombing. Certainly one could point out that regardless how small Hungary was compared to the Soviet Union, it would have been to the Soviet disadvantage to provoke another country into the war.

Last but not least, one must consider the case of Soviet bombing. Certainly one could quickly point out that regardless of how small Hungary was compared to the Soviet Union, it would have been to the Soviet disadvantage to provoke another country into war. On the other hand, all the evidence seems to indicate that Russian aircraft must have dropped the Russian-made bombs on Kassa.

There are two possible motives to explain the Soviet bombing of Kassa. Slovakia, Hungary's

<sup>9</sup> Ref. Adonyi: "*A Magyar Katona...*" Op.Cit. Pg. 27

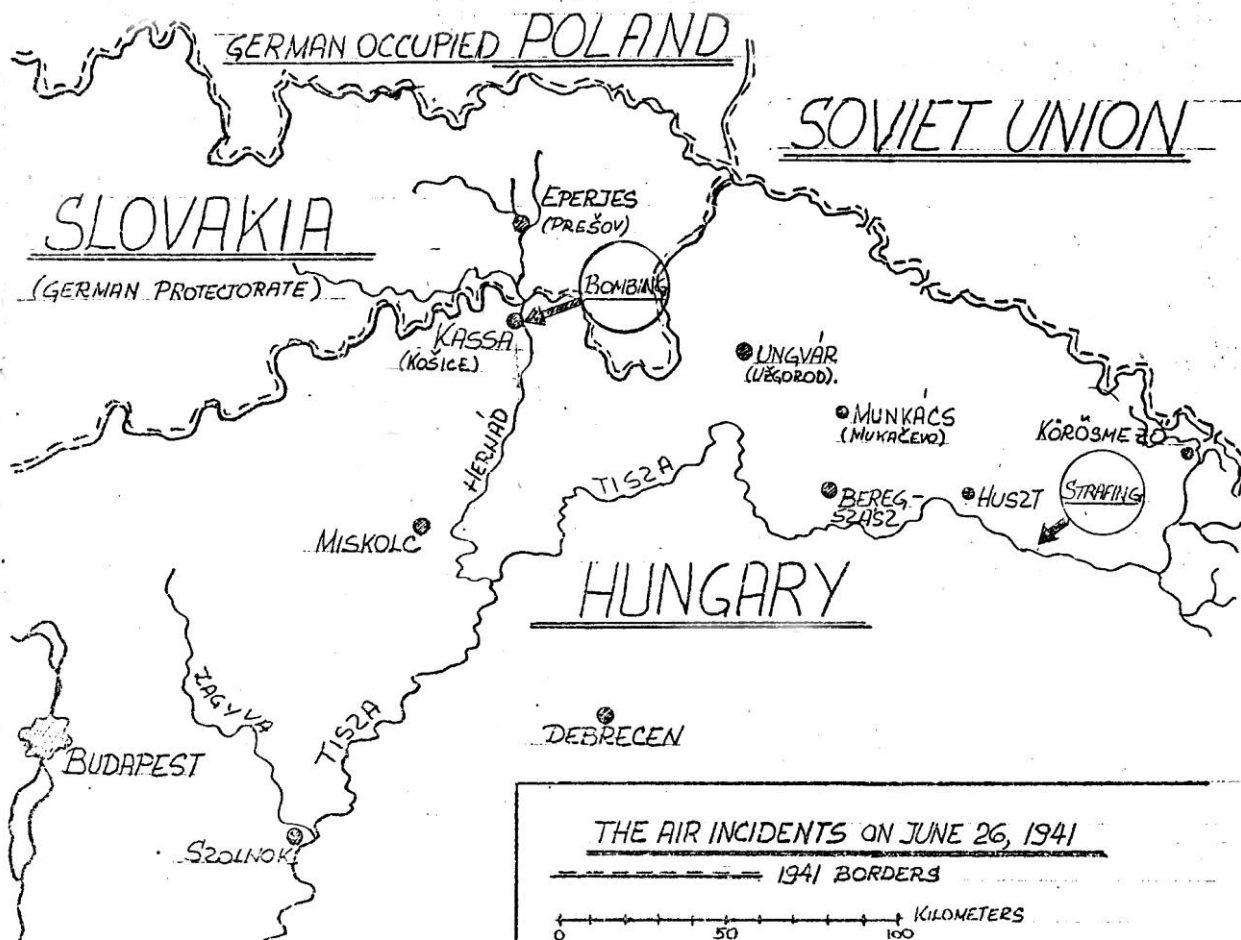
<sup>10</sup> Ref. Adonyi: "*A Magyar Katona...*" Op.Cit. Pg. 27

## PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE

northern neighbor declared war on the Soviet Union on June 22, four days earlier than the incident. The Hungarian-Slovak border ran just 6 kilometers north of the city. All of the captured maps from the Russians at that time were outdated old maps, showing the city of Kassa in "Czechoslovakia" (from 1920 to 1938 Kassa belonged not to Hungary but to Czechoslovakia). Therefore it is plausible to believe that Russian aircraft bombed the city believing they retaliating on a city in Slovakia for the declaration of war. The identified strafing incident of the passenger train in the same general area about 90 miles from Kassa seems to bear out the same theory. But it is also plausible that the Soviet planes intended to bomb Eperjes (Presov) in Slovakia, which is only 30 km. from Kassa, and they made a navigational error.

Another possible explanation is even more simple. The Soviets retaliated for breaking off diplomatic relations with them, since in their opinion it could have meant siding with the enemy.

While the riddle of Kassa continues, from a historical perspective of over five decades and as an epilog to that infamous day one may conclude that the events were the symptoms and not the cause of Hungary's fate. Looking at the political map of Europe of those days, it becomes obvious that with Hungary situated where she is, she could not have escaped the consequences of the power struggle of the two super powers of those days. Both, the Third Reich and the Soviet Union used the small nations around themselves as expendable pawns for their own interests.







## **7. FALLING INTO THE ABYSS**

The conditions under which Hungarian army entered the war.

On June 27<sup>th</sup> Hungary's army by most standards was ill equipped to enter the war. Hungary's industry was just recovering from the burdens of "Trianon" and was often retarded by lack of raw materials, was unable to meet the required schedule for the new defense needs. The 18 years of "Trianon" could not be made up in three short years from 1938 to 1941. Although the "HUBA" organization was in effect on paper at this time, the troops were short on equipment and materiel. In particular those weapons were scarce which were forbidden by the peace edict, automatic weapons, heavy infantry weapons and all type of armored vehicles. Furthermore the most pressing problem was the scarcity of antitank weapons that remained a constant problem throughout the war. The government tried to purchase armored vehicles, especially tanks from Germany, but due to heavy materiel losses of the North African campaign, the Germans could not supply them in the required quantities. Furthermore, only a very small portion of the army was mechanized and the overwhelming majority of the army had to rely on horse drawn vehicles. In fact the only totally mechanized outfits in existence at the time were the two brigades of the Mobile Corps.



**Honvéd Infantryman**

inferior equipment.

On the positive side, however the discipline was excellent and the morale was good. These factors, coupled with the basic military characteristics of the Hungarian people compensated for the materiel deficiencies, and proved over and over again, that the combatant units of the Hungarian Army were first rate battle troops.

The relationship with the German allies continuously fluctuated throughout the war ranging from excellent to hostile, problems arose frequently under critical situations and there were instances of armed conflicts with the Germans over such matters as living quarters and gasoline. Another problem that arose frequently, especially among the smaller Hungarian units away from the main body of the army, was due to the difference in the small arms

ammunition of the German and Hungarian weapons. Consequently, the German field commanders could not supply these units with ammunition.

In comparison to his German counterpart, the Hungarian soldier continuously had to outperform himself, since he was assigned and expected to accomplish the same tasks as the German soldier did despite his



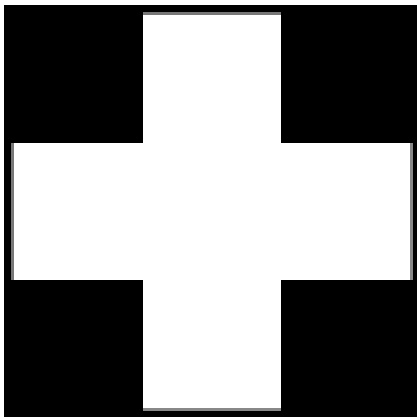
**Officers in field uniform**

## PART I. A PEACE WITHOUT TRUCE

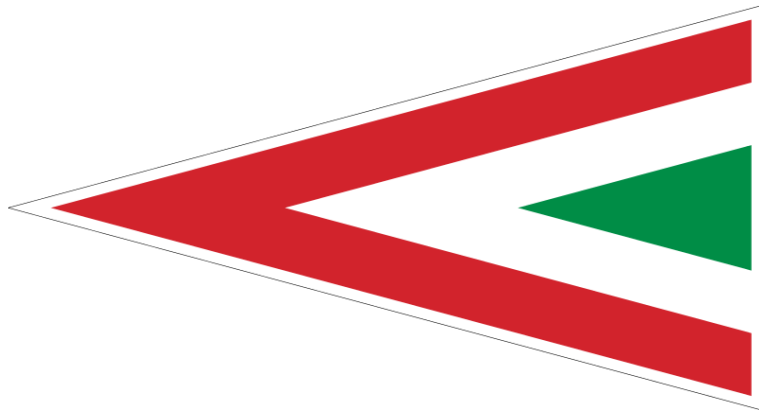
Aside from these problems, however, it can be said, that where mutual respect and trust was present, the joint military operations were very successful. Also on these successful operations Hungarian soldiers were very frequently decorated by the Germans.



Left: roundel on all Hungarian military equipment, Right: Insignia of the *Honvédség* (Homeland Defenders)



Aircraft wing and body roundel



Aircraft tail roundel



## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

### 1. ADVANCE TO THE DONETZ.

On June 27<sup>th</sup> when Regent Horthy, as supreme commander of the armed forces, issued his orders to commence military operations, the following units were assembled in the North-Eastern Carpathians under the code name of “Carpath Group”. The VIII Corps consisting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Border Guard Brigade and the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountaineer Brigade, and the Mobile Corps consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Brigades, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Brigade. Over the entire “Carpath Group” the command was assumed by the VIII Corps commander, Lt. Field Marshal Ferenc Szombathelyi, with his command post at the town of Munkács.



**Gen. Szombathelyi**

Upon receiving the orders, the troops opened a two pronged offensive towards the towns of Stanislau and Kolomea. Pushing back the Soviet troops along the entire line, the northern prong by July 5<sup>th</sup> reached Stanislau, and on July 6<sup>th</sup> successfully crossed the River Dniester. The southern prong took the town of Kolomea, and also reached the Dniester by July 6<sup>th</sup>.

The Kolomea-Stanislau area was the territory of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, (called Galicia) of some twenty years before. Most of the population still remembered those days, and so greeted the troops in a friendly manner. On July 9<sup>th</sup>, the units of the Border Guard and the Mountaineer Brigades under the command of Gen. Maj. György Rakovszky were assigned to the mopping up operations and occupational duties of the area. The Mobile Corps commanded by Gen. Maj. Béla dálnoki Miklós was reassigned on July 9<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army under Gen. Col. Carl Heinrich von Stülpnagel, which in turn was subordinated to “Army Group South” commanded by Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt.

The troops of the Mobile Corps advanced eastward always keeping close contact with the retreating enemy. On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, they



**Gen. Szombathelyi awarding decorations on the front**

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

reached the River Bug (pronounced Boog), where the Soviet troops put up some very stiff resistance on the eastern bank. The spearhead of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Brigade broke through the Soviet defense on July 28<sup>th</sup>, paving the way for the other units.

In the meantime, the 1<sup>st</sup> German Panzer Army commanded by Gen. Col. von Kleist punched through the Russian defenses north of the city of Uman and its spearhead under Gen. Manteuffel succeeded cutting off a large portion of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Soviet Armies. The encirclement of the trapped enemy force was supposed to be completed by a southern prong of Kleist's army and the infantry units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Armies commanded by Gen. Col. von Schobert moving up from the south east.



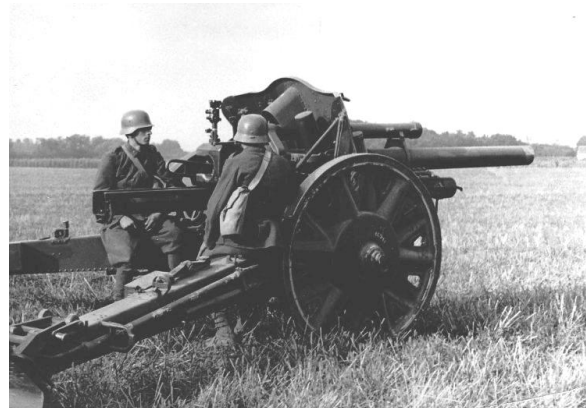
Surrendering Soviet soldiers in Uman



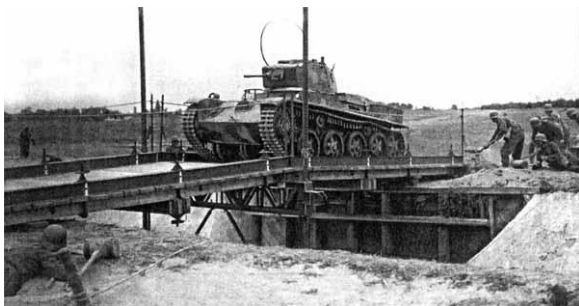
Captured Soviet tank



Advancing Hungarian Infantry



Hungarian artillery piece



Hungarian *Toldi* tank crossing a field bridge



Soviet T-34 tank



## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

After crossing the Bug Gen. Col. Stülpnagel ordered the Mobile Corps to press forward and complete the encirclement from the south-west until Gen. Kleist's southern prong could reach this area. The mechanized brigades quickly advanced, followed by the cavalry brigade and completed the encirclement on August 6<sup>th</sup>, with the 257<sup>th</sup> German Division, the Mobile Corps repulsed the breakout attempt of the Soviet forces in the vicinity of the village of Golowansk. There the Hungarian troops took more than 3,000 Russian prisoners. During the battle of Golowansk, Ensign László Merész distinguished himself especially, who was awarded the "Golden Medal of Valor" for his action.

By August 9<sup>th</sup> the Battle of Uman ended with 20 trapped Soviet Divisions surrendering, yielding approximately 103,000 prisoners, 300 tanks, and 800 artillery pieces.<sup>11</sup>

In comparison the Soviet losses at Uman exceeded the German losses at Stalingrad in Feb. 1943.

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, Field Marshal Rundstedt ordered the Mobile Corps with the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division to spearhead the advance toward the city of Nikolayev. The objective of the quick advance was to cut off the withdrawal of the units of the 9<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army. Nikolayev was taken jointly by the German, Hungarian and Romanian forces on Aug. 16<sup>th</sup>, the Hungarian troops taking at this time approximately 2,000 Russian prisoners. After brief rest period, the Mobile Corps was ordered to defensive positions on the western bank of the Dnieper south of Dnepropetrovsk. A 200 km (124 miles) defense sector was assigned to the Corps. In the vicinity of Zaporozhe, the Soviet forces attempted several counterattacks from Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>. During these days both sides suffered very heavy casualties, the hardest hit unit, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Brigade that suffered 450 casualties during the five day period.<sup>12</sup>

On Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> the Cavalry Brigade due to its previous heavy losses was relieved by fresh German units and began its rail transportation back to Hungary. On Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> the remaining brigades of the Corps again took the initiative. They successfully crossed the river and mounted a new offensive toward the River Donetz.



Gen. Rakovsky

After heavy fighting the units reached the Donetz by the town of Izium on October 30<sup>th</sup>, ahead of the adjoining German troops. In mid-November the battle weary units of the Corps were gradually pulled out, and the units began their rail transportation back to Hungary.

It should be mentioned at this point that the squadrons of the Hungarian Air Force assigned to support the Mobile Corps provided important assistance to the success of the operations.

Although the units suffered heavy casualties and material losses in the campaign, they advanced more than 620 miles (1066 km) in 80 days, averaging almost 8 miles a day from their original positions, and contributed significantly to the success of one of the most spectacular military campaigns of all times.

At the departure of the Mobile Corps, Gen. Hermann Hoth, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Army made the following statement:

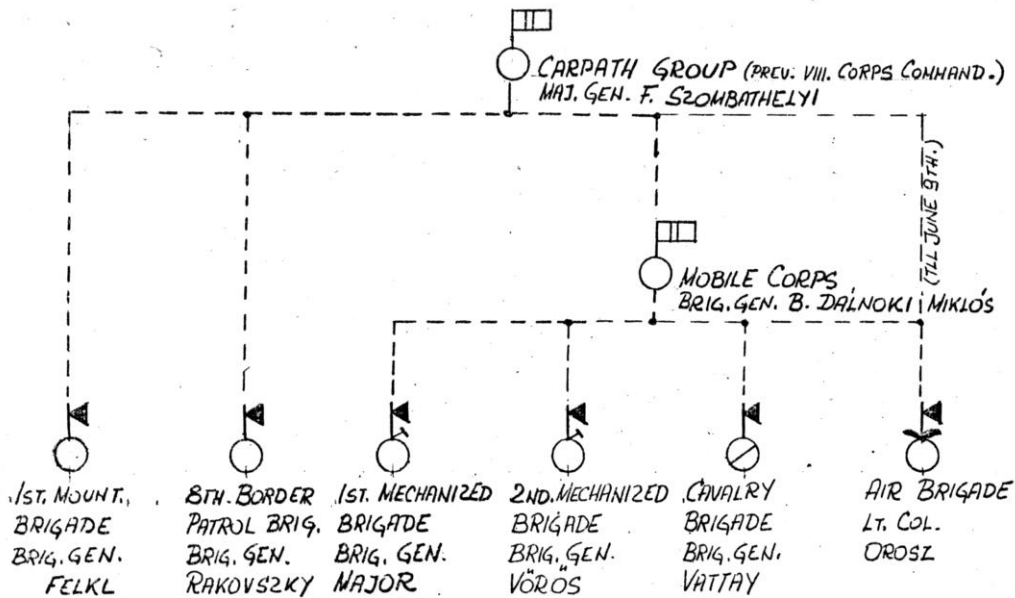
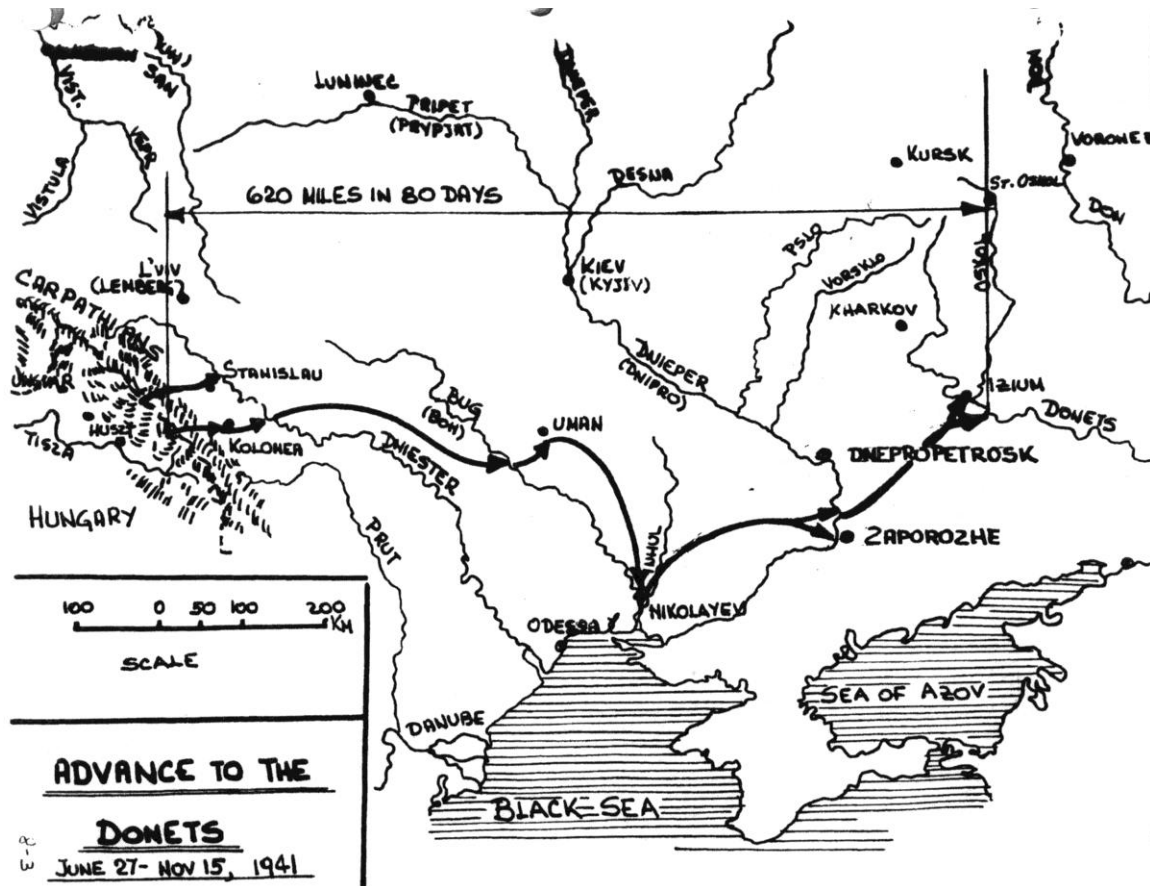
*"The Mobile Corps, with extraordinary achievements has contributed to the advance of the German troops to the Donetz, and prevented the enemy from encircling the German troops fighting south of it. The Mobile Corps brought new thrust to the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and it was the first unit to reach the Donetz."*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Ref. Time Life: *Russia Besieged*. pg. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Ref: dálnoki Veress: "*Magyarország honvédelme a II. Világháború előtt és alatt*" (The Armed Forces of Hungary before and during the 2nd World War) Danubia Press, Munich, 1974. Vol.2, pg. 173.

<sup>13</sup>Ref: dálnoki Veress: "*Magyarország honvédelme ..*" op.cit. - Vol. 2., pg. 176.

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY



THE ORGANIZATION OF THE  
CARPATH GROUP.



## **2. THE ARMY OF HONOR.**

The glorious and tragic story of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army fighting the overwhelming odds in the treacherous Russian Winter. The river Don, the “Dunkirk” of the Hungarian Army, who left this place as the rearguards of the rearguards. .

1. Prelude.
2. The Organization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.
3. The German - Hungarian Summer Offensive.
4. The Russian Winter, the invincible enemy.
5. The Battle of Stalingrad and its consequences.
6. The Soviet Attack at Uryw.
7. The Offensive at Shtshutshje.
8. A Valiant Attempt.
9. Island of Defense.
10. The Rear Guard action of the Armor Division.
11. The Tragic Struggle of the III Corps.
12. Conclusions.

## 2.1. Prelude.

Although it is not the intent of this book to dwell upon the relationship between the German High Command (the OKH)<sup>14</sup> and Hitler, and his growing mistrust toward the top echelon of the “Wehrmacht” (the regular German Army), let it be said, that his interventions into the plans of the German General Staff, with his logic of the “Gefreiter” - the corporal - caused to a great extent the ever increasing military disasters of the German Army. Someone once stated with some sarcasm that one of the best secret weapons the allies had, was Hitler's continuous desire to play general.

Such was the case in the 1941 offensive, which, after a brilliant start, nearly ended in a disaster in the Battle of Moscow during the winter of 1941/42. Although the Germans and their allies achieved unprecedented victories, the plans for a quick “Blitzkrieg” victory in Russia had failed. Most military experts agree now that the failure was caused by Hitler's sudden decision contrary to the plans of the OKH to shift the offensive from the Moscow area to the south toward the Caucasian oil fields. The German High Command consequently wanted to accomplish a total military victory in Russia in 1942 at all cost. The disastrous losses at the Battle of Moscow, however compelled the Germans to pressure their allies for maximum help (Hungary was a de facto ally of Germany due to the events of Kassa). The German High Command solicited Italian, Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Finnish and Spanish troops for this campaign.

Field Marshal Keitel, the Commander in Chief of the Wehrmacht arrived in Budapest on Jan 20<sup>th</sup>, 1942 to open discussions with the Hungarian Chief of the General Staff, General Colonel Ferenc Szombathelyi, General Werth's successor, concerning Hungary's participation in the campaign. In their talks General Szombathelyi certainly made no secret about the Hungarian Army's lack of equipment. Keitel replied, however, with a much-quoted promise “We shall make the equipment of the Hungarian troops equal to that of the German troops upon their arrival to the battle zone”. This promise was never fulfilled, probably not because the Germans did not want to, but because they could not. The Promised weapons would have been most likely antitank and automatic weapons for the infantry.

Originally, Keitel's request was for fifteen front line divisions and eight occupational divisions and one armored division for front line deployment and seven occupational divisions of which five had been on the field already.

According to the other points of the agreement, the German quartermaster was supposed to provide food provisions to the Hungarian units and in return Hungary had to turn over equivalent amounts of bulk food to Germany. All the prisoners and captured equipment had to be turned over to the Wehrmacht. Hungary was supposed to supply clothing, equipment and ammunition for her own troops. Hungary's condition in the agreement was that the Hungarian troops be kept together as one fighting force. Again through unofficial channels, the Hitler government hinted that Romania, Hungary's rival for Transylvania intended to commit more than twice as many troops to the campaign.

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<sup>14</sup> OKH. Ober Kommando des Heeres.



## 2.2. The organization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

The front line troops were organized into nine “light” infantry divisions and an armored division. Three Divisions formed a Corps and three Corps formed the Army, which had been designated as the “Second Hungarian Army”. At the time of the organization the armor division was directly subordinated to army headquarters. Regent Horthy appointed General Colonel *vitéz* Gusztáv Jány to be the army commander. General Jány had had a long and distinguished military career.



**Gen Gusztáv Jány**

Each light infantry division consisted of the following units:

2 infantry regiments: (3 battalions each.)

1 field artillery regiment (Total of 16 light and 8 medium artillery pieces.)

1 antiaircraft artillery battery (6 artillery pieces.)

1 combat engineer company

1 cavalry (Hussar) troop.

1 medical unit.

1 signal corps unit.

The light artillery and the transportation units were horse-drawn and there were no tanks or armored vehicles assigned to the infantry division. The reason for the “light” designation was that the division contained only two infantry regiments

In contrast, both the German and the Russian divisions were organized into a “system of three”, that is they had three infantry regiments, which meant one-third larger manpower. Due to their modern equipment, meaning a larger number of automatic weapons. They had larger firepower. Even so, the skimpy organization of the Hungarian divisions took practically everything the armed forces had, leaving the remaining units in the homeland with hardly any equipment at all. Considering everything, the organization based on the system of “two” instead of “three” seemed to be the best compromise at the time, under the circumstances.



**Church service at the front**



**A farewell before leaving for the Russian front**



Attacking Hungarian infantry

### 2.3. The German-Hungarian Summer Offensive

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army began its mobilization early in 1942. The first troops to leave for the battle zone were the army headquarters and the III Corps, which began their rail transportation on April 11 1942. The first troops were followed by the units of the IV Corps and finally the VII Corps completed transportation process. Due to transportation difficulties, the troops of the IV Corps had to march 1000 km (620 miles) to reach their designated staging areas.

Until the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Army reached the battle zone the German High Command (OKH) subordinated the VII. German Corps to the Second Hungarian Army headquarters. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army began its operation in the summer offensive Code named "*Fall Blau*" (Blue) toward the River Don. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Advancing troops of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division reached the fortified town of Tim, where the Soviets put up a very stubborn resistance. In four days of heavy fighting the troops took the town pushing the enemy back toward the Don. The lion share of the fighting was borne by the 7<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup>

infantry Regiment, which suffered 50% casualties in these four days.



Gen Jány (with field glasses) on the front line

The forward elements reached the Don on July 6<sup>th</sup>, and by July 10<sup>th</sup> all of the units had reached their objectives. Some reconnaissance patrols and later larger combat patrols even crossed the Don and helped their units on the western bank to take up their positions.

The joint German - Hungarian summer offensive was a complete military success. The troops reached their objectives before the projected schedule. They penetrated a front 200 km (140 miles) wide and 150 - 170 km (90 miles) deep into the Soviet defense cutting the Moscow - Rostov

connecting link. During the ten-day offensive they took 99,000 prisoners and captured or destroyed 1000 tanks and 570 enemy aircraft.

Upon reaching the Don, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was ordered into defensive positions on the western bank of the river and a 230 km (142 miles) sector south of Voronezh from Ustye to Pavlovsk assigned to it. From North to South, the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army formed "Army Group B" under the command of Generaloberst Weichs. South of Army

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY



**Field fortifications at the Don**

Group B was “Army Group Don” commanded by Field Marshal Manstein. It consisted of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian, the 6<sup>th</sup> German, the 4<sup>th</sup> German Panzer and the 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian Armies. Originally, all of these armies were under the command of Army Group B, consisting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Armies. Since the German High Command shifted the offensive to the south toward Stalingrad again, the objective of Army Group B and Army Group

Don was to secure the northern flank of the Stalingrad forces. Opposing Army Group B stood the Soviet Voronezh Front under General Golikov, and opposing Army Group Don was the Soviet South-West Front under General Vatutin.

From July 18<sup>th</sup> to September 15<sup>th</sup> a series of very bloody bridgehead battles were fought with very heavy casualties on both sides. In a way both sides could be considered victorious since both sides prevented the other from accomplishing its objective. The Russians wanted to establish a large bridgehead in the curve of the Don between Uryw and Korotoyak, while the Hungarians wanted to eliminate any Russian pockets on the western bank. At the conclusion of these exceedingly bloody battles, the Hungarians took possession of the western bank of the Don including Korotoyak, with the exception of a miniature bridgehead at Shtshutshje and a somewhat larger one at Uryw, both located in a hairpin swampy curve of the Don. The casualties of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in these battles were about 12,000 men, with 50% of the junior officer killed and 25% wounded in action. The hardest hit was the 12<sup>th</sup> Division, which suffered 30% casualties.



**Captured T-34 tank**

After September 15<sup>th</sup> for the next few months there was relative quiet on the front with both sides fortifying and preparing for the unexpected.



**Generaloberst Maximilian von Weichs commanding general of Army Group B**

**The chief adversaries**



**General F.I. Golikov commander of the Voronezh front**

## 2.4. The Russian winter, the invincible enemy.

As was stated above, the G.K.H. moved all the troops it could spare to the “Stalingrad Front Sector” and left a very scant defense along the Don. This policy could have been perhaps justified during the summer months, but during the long bitterly cold winter, when the river froze solid enough to support vehicles, this certainly was an open invitation to disaster. The 142-mile sector assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's 54 infantry battalions was much too long. It took every available troop to cover the sector in one single line of defense, which meant that the defense had no depth and the army had no reserves at all. To make things even worse, the Hungarian Armor Division was taken away from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Command and was assigned to a German Corps, under the command of General Cramer, to be designated as “Army Group B Reserve” subordinated directly to General Weichs. The “Cramer Corps” was actually the only tactical reserve of the entire army group.

Traditionally, the Hungarian army had been very proud of its horses, and with good reason, since some of the finest horses in Europe are bred on the Hungarian plains. Now these beautiful

and noble animals were dying in large numbers, due to the severely adverse conditions. On the overtaxed and long supply lines according to directive of the German High Command, ammunition and fuel were considered top priority, provisions for the troops were second, equipment and clothing was third, and horse feed was last on the list of priorities.

In overall priorities, the Stalingrad forces had priority in everything and Army Group B was low in priority since it was assigned only to defensive positions. Moreover, the Germans controlled all the supply lines, consequently they favored their own troops when worst came to worst. Unfortunately

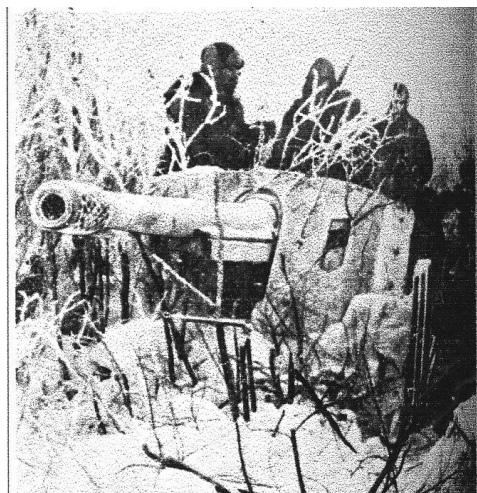


**The only reliable way of transportation is the horse-drawn sledge.**

horses had to live on what could be gathered up for them locally, which was hardly ever more than straw and dry cornstalk. Under the severe conditions of the Russian winter to which these underfed animals were not accustomed at all, the horse stock of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was quickly deteriorating. This meant that most of the equipment and guns that could not be carried by humans was confined to stay; furthermore the cavalry units lost their mobility and for all practical purposes they became infantry and the entire army became an immobile army.

The winter clothing for the troops had left Hungary in early September, but due to the supply line difficulties, did not reach the front line troops until Christmas with such items as mittens, pullovers and woolen socks. The heavy linings and the warm “halina boots” never got to most of the troops at all. Consequently, the casualties due to frostbite mounted continuously.

General Jány could do hardly anything about the situation, although he was well aware of it. He lived in a puritan atmosphere with his staff, and insisted on being served the very same food and provisions that the front line troops were getting. He made frequent inspection



**A defensive position on the banks of the Don.**



## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY



**The Front Line**

spector general of the field artillery. By the use of this instrument, the fire direction center could concentrate the fire of several remotely located guns to a single target with very quickly with high accuracy. The Soviet troops dreaded the accuracy of the Hungarian artillery fire so much that they frequently sent messages over on loudspeakers: "Don't let us capture a Hungarian artillery man". Due to the artillery ammunition shortage, however, the artillery could not reach its full effectiveness; a certain number of shells were "allowed" for a day and anything above that required the permission of the division commander himself. Consequently, the infantry had to rely on its own small arms for much of its fire protection.

Such were the conditions on the front, which the Second Hungarian Army had to face, day by day as the vicious winter set in with 30 degrees below zero temperatures.

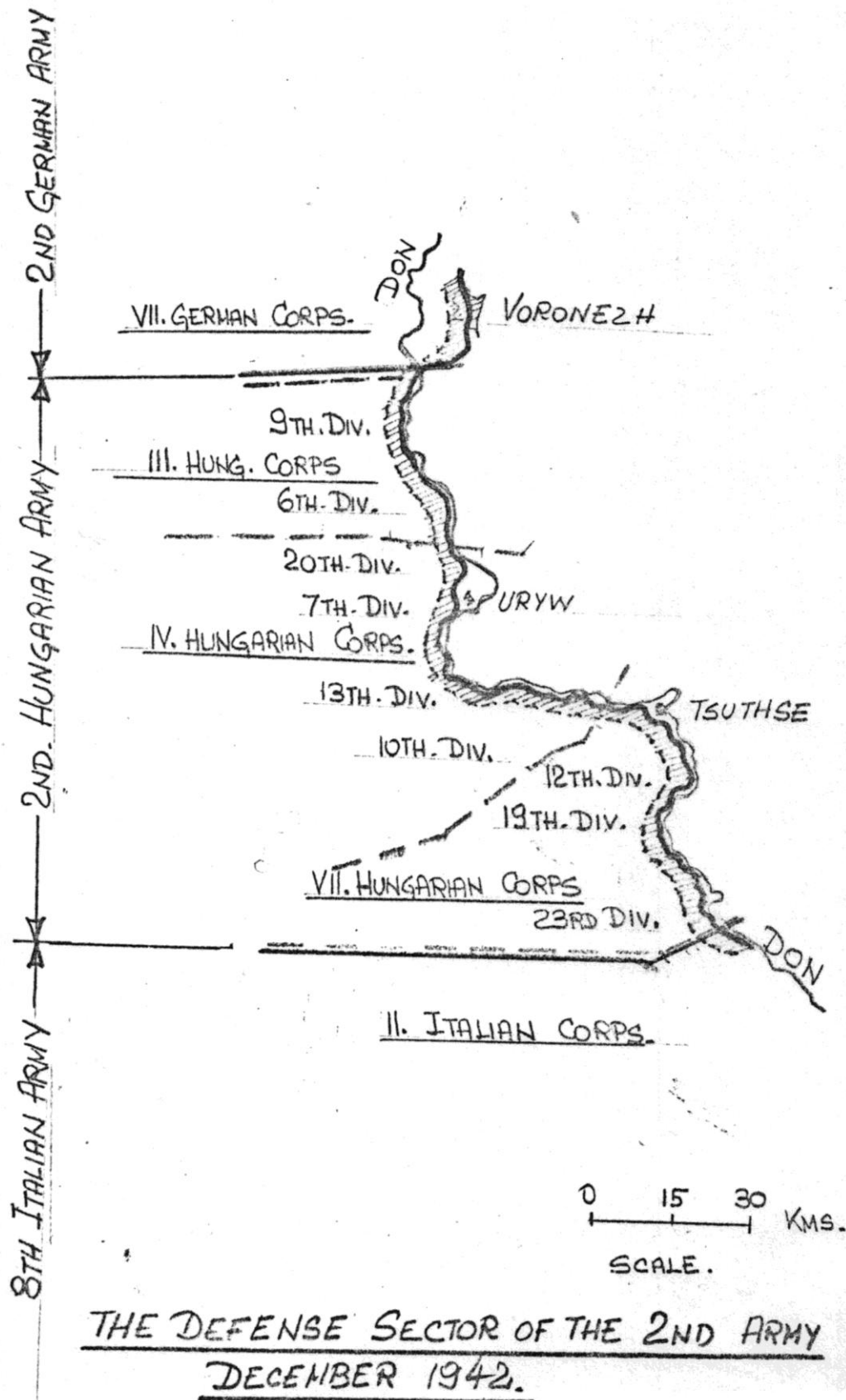
tours on the front lines and discussed the tactical situation with forward field commanders such as battalion and company commanders. On one of these inspection tours he was hit in the shoulder by a sniper's bullet and was hospitalized for several weeks. (Probably one of the few army commanders in the Second World war who were wounded by a bullet on the front line.)

The Hungarian field artillery by the standards of those days was extraordinarily accurate. This was made possible with the use of an instrument invented by an artillery officer, Kálmán Ternegg who by this time was the in-



**Russian P.O.W.s**

PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY





## 2.5. The battle of Stalingrad and its consequences.

In the summer of 1942 it seemed like disastrous winter battle of Moscow was hardly more than an unbelievable bad dream. The German summer offensive, with its main thrust toward the south east, certainly had produced spectacular military victories again. The 4<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Army under Gen. Col. Hoth was racing toward the Caspian Sea, the 1<sup>st</sup> German Panzer Army under Gen. Col. Kleist was quickly advancing toward the Caucasus Mountains, and the 6<sup>th</sup> German army commanded by Gen. Col. Paulus had reached the River Volga at Stalingrad. The city that the Soviet dictator named after himself. The German army had found itself again, and it was cutting through the Russian defenses like a hot knife through butter.

By the end of September the Germans had taken most of Stalingrad, but soon the overtaxed supply lines began to take their tolls. With the fall rains coming on, the primitive Russian roads became a sea of mud and the offensive ground to a halt. A good portion of the winter gear for these troops got stuck somewhere around the city of Rostov and already in mid-November the temperature had dipped into the subzero range. It should be noted also that most of the Russian railroads had been systematically destroyed by the retreating Russian troops and even those that were left behind had to be rebuilt from the wide Russian track to the standard European gauge track. The continuous nuisance of the Communist Partisans on the supply columns also contributed to the difficulties. The Red Army fighting on its home ground, of course was aware of all of these problems and at the right time wanted to capitalize on them.

In brief, history had repeated itself; the German army and its allies had outrun their supply lines and were caught unprepared for the Russian winter, the same way that Napoleon's Grand Army had been 139 years ago.

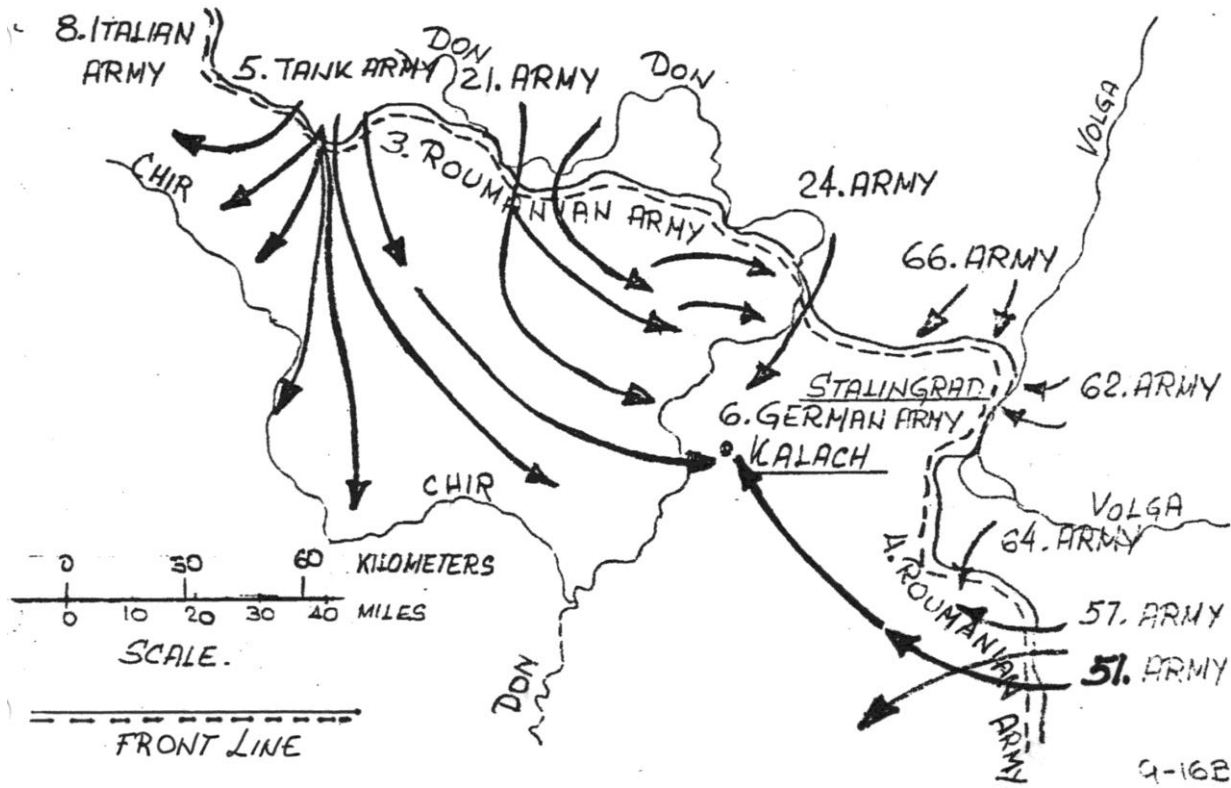
During all this time the top brass of the Stavka, Marshal Zhukov, General Vasilevsky, and Gen. Voronov reorganized the entire front, from Voronezh to Stalingrad and from its seemingly inexhaustible manpower and materiel supply marshaled fresh troops all along the line further increasing the Red Army's numerical superiority everywhere. On the Don Front sector alone, the Stavka concentrated a staggering number of one million troops, 13,541 artillery pieces and 984 tanks.<sup>15</sup> Then at the right moment, the "Don Front" north of Stalingrad under Gen. Rokossovsky, with the 21<sup>st</sup> Army (Gen. Chistiakov) and the 65<sup>th</sup> Army (Gen. Batov) and the 24<sup>th</sup> Army (Gen. Galinin) had launched its offensive at 07:30 hrs on Nov. 19<sup>th</sup>. The main thrust was directed toward the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army commanded by Gen. Petre Dimitrescu. The Romanian resistance crumbled in a few hours, like a clay pigeon under a powerful hammer blow. The quick victory however, had been greatly aided by Brigadier General Traian Stanesco at Raspopinskaya, who sent an envoy to the Russians and surrendered with 27,000 Romanian troops allowing the Red Army to pour through his sector even quicker, causing total disaster for the rest of the Romanians. The Soviet forces pouring through the Romanian lines split in two directions a portion turned southeast toward the back of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army at Stalingrad, while the other prong turned south-west toward the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army. (The Italian Army was joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army on its southern flank.) To avoid encirclement, the Italians quickly retreated to Valuiki. Only the Alpine Corps held out in its positions on the northern flank till the end of December till the Russians pushed these units back also.

In the meanwhile, the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army was kept busy at Stalingrad by the frontal attacks of Gen. Alexey Zhadov's 66<sup>th</sup> Army and Gen. Vasily Chuikov's 62<sup>nd</sup> Army.

On Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>, the second phase of the Russian offensive commenced south of Stalingrad by the Stalingrad Front under Gen. Yeremenko. At this front sector the 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian and the 4<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Armies were intermingled on the line, the Romanians under General Ciuperca and the Germans under Generaloberst Hoth. Here too the Romanian held sectors had been chosen as

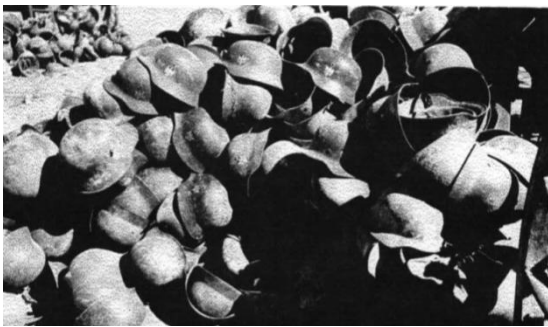
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<sup>15</sup> Ref: Geoffrey Jukes: Stalingrad, the Turning Point. Ballantine's Books, 1968. Pg. 106.

THE RUSSIAN ATTACK AT STALINGRAD Nov 19-20, 1942.

the soft spot of the defense for the Soviet onslaught. The 64<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army (Gen. Shumilov), the 57<sup>th</sup> Army (Gen. Tolbukhin) and the 51<sup>st</sup> Army (Gen. Trufanov) attacked simultaneously. Here too the Soviets broke through the Romanian lines causing panic and disorder.

The confusion spread to the adjoining German troops and organized resistance broke down in spite of all the efforts of Generaloberst (General Colonel) Leopold von Schwedler. It must be mentioned that some German officers tried to reorganize the troops into battle groups and the units



Piles of thrown away German helmets at Stalingrad.

of the 29<sup>th</sup> German Mechanized Division conducted themselves very well, but in general disorder, prevailed on the entire front sector. The Soviet troops completed the iron ring now from the north and south around the city of Stalingrad and the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army was trapped. The German High Command countered by rushing one of its most capable general; Field Marshal Erich von Manstein to this front sector and ordered the formation of a new army group under his command. Field Marshal Manstein quickly pulled his shattered troops together and ordered Gen. Hoth's

Panzer Army to counterattack. The relief force at one time approached the trapped 6<sup>th</sup> Army to within 10 miles, but Hitler's constant meddling in the affairs stifled the best efforts. He stubbornly refused permission for a breakout, instead, he promoted Paulus to "field marshal" and he insisted on Göring's advice that the Luftwaffe could supply the encircled troops. (A dubious consolation prize) The 6<sup>th</sup> Army held out till it ran out of ammunition, food and medical supplies.

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY



**Feldmarschall Friedrich Paulus**



**Marshal Georgy K. Zhukov, the chief architect of the Soviet's Stalingrad victory, who henceforth became Stalin's favorite general.**



**Feldmarschall Eric von Manstein, whose relief efforts were called off by Hitler**

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY



Haggard and unshaven, Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus Commander of the Sixth German Army surrendering to the Russians on January 31, 1943.

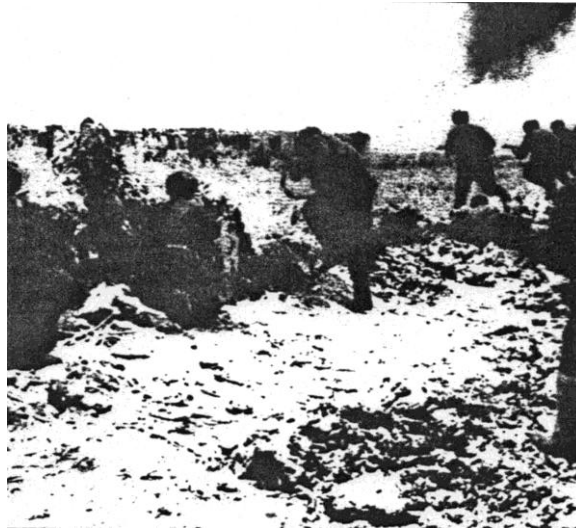
Finally, Field Marshal Paulus surrendered with 91,000 destitute Germans on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1943.

According to most historians Stalingrad was the turning point of the Second World War. The Wehrmacht suffered a mortal wound; from the original 330,000 men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army there was 100,000 wounded and dead, 91,000 captured and the rest unaccounted for. Most of the prisoners died in captivity due to frostbite, malnutrition and typhus. From this point on in time the Red Army always maintained a favorable manpower balance at least three to one throughout the entire front.

Field Marshal Paulus survived his captivity, where he joined a pro Communist organization, the “Free Officers Committee” and after the war he returned to Soviet occupied East Germany, where he lived undisturbed for the rest of his life.



Columns of German prisoners being marched out of Stalingrad. Nine out of ten never returned home.



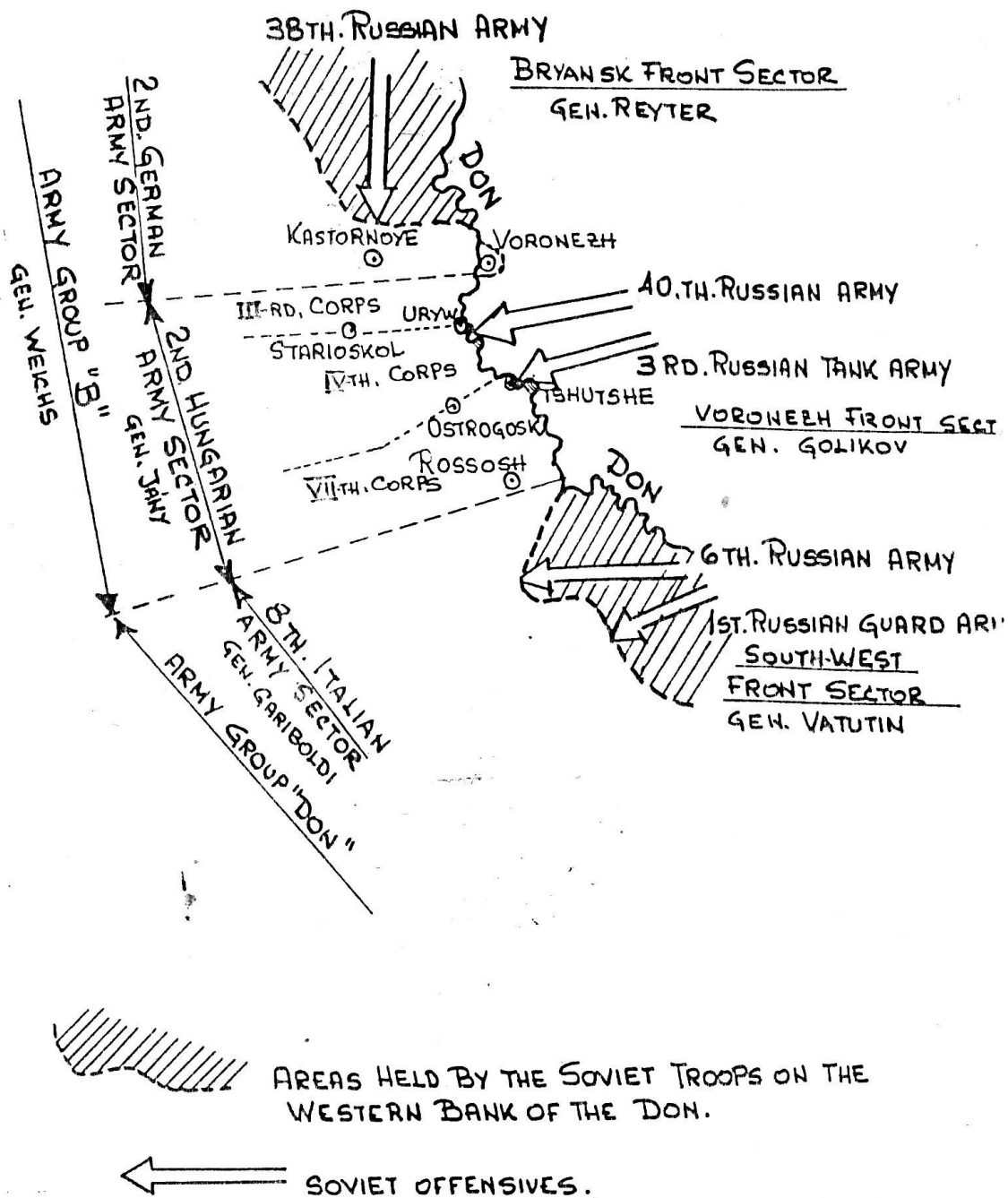
Red army resurgent

## 2.6. The red army exploits the victory.

With the Stalingrad victory well on its way, the confident Soviet leadership was ready to open its offensive on the “South West Front” sector commanded by General Vatutin and on the “Voronezh Front” sector commanded by General Golikov. Vatutin's objective was the destruction of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, and Golikov's specific task was the destruction of the Second Hungarian Army, then together joined by the 38<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, with overwhelming power encircle the Second German Army and to push forward toward the cities of Kharkov and Kursk. To accomplish the objective the Russians assembled from south to north a quite formidable force. The 1<sup>st</sup> Guard Army, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Army, the Army, 40<sup>th</sup> Army and the 38<sup>th</sup> Army, along the “South West” the “Voronezh” and the “Bryansk” front sectors.

As stated above, General Golikov's task was to destroy the Second Hungarian Army, with an attack by the Third Tank Army on the southern flank and with a frontal attack by the 40<sup>th</sup> Army. The attack was supposed to be developing from the bridgeheads at Uryw and Shtshutshje (The River Don was frozen solid.) The 40<sup>th</sup> Army consisted of an equivalent of eight infantry and five tank divisions and numerous “special” troops.

The headquarters of the Second Hungarian Army relying upon its reconnaissance reports, expected the Soviet attack since Christmas and repeatedly requested reserve forces. These requests were ignored by Army Group B headquarters, probably because all the available troops were deployed already to stabilize the disastrous Stalingrad situation. The only tactical reserve of Army Group B, the Cramer Corps to which the Hungarian Armor Division was assigned, had been ordered to the southern flank where the Russians had made considerable gains against the neighboring Eight Italian Army. Actually general Weichs did not give credit to General Jány's reports and requests and did not consider a frontal attack probable when the Russians had an opportunity further to exploit their gains on the southern flank. On the contrary, General Jány was convinced of a frontal attack and he requested permission for a flexible defense in case of overwhelming pressure. Permission was denied upon direct orders from Hitler, with the familiar phrase, “Es muss ausgehalten werden.” – “It must be held, (at all cost).” Consequently, General Jány was denied all the means of a capable defense: reserves and flexibility.



THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE 2ND. HUNGARIAN ARMY



## 2.7. The soviet attack at Uryw.

The Soviet attack began on Jan. 12, 1943 at 9:30 in the morning, with two hours of unprecedented heavy artillery fire. It was a frontal attack on the Northern sector of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army just as General Jány had predicted. The main pressure was concentrated on a 2 km (1.2 miles) wide sector



**Attacking Soviet infantry at Uryw**

by bridgehead Uryw. This section was held by the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment from the city of Sopron and by the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

At the conclusion of the artillery barrage, the Russian attack came in three massive human waves, the last group moving on skis. The Russian infantry was supported by quite a number of "T-34" tanks. In spite of the accurate Hungarian artillery fire, the Russian waves reached the Hungarian positions by noon. At 12:15 Colonel Győző Ilkey field artillery regiment commander, reported bitter hand- to-hand combat in the gun positions. The 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment by that time had suffered great casualties, and most of its positions were overrun. However, it was still holding on its original positions where there were able-bodied men left. Unfortunately, the Hungarian 37 mm. antitank gun was totally

ineffective against the new T-34 tanks, which was the standard equipment of the infantry, only the few newer 75-mm. guns were capable of knocking out these tanks at close range. (Approx. 50 meters or yards.)

South of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment was in position. When its commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Béla Vécsey, saw the difficult situation, he ordered his 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to counterattack to aid the battered 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment. The battalion charged with fixed bayonets, with First Lieutenant Boldizsár leading the assault. The Russians were pushed back again, and the battalion even took some prisoners. The troops counted over 300 enemy corpses in front of the retaken Hungarian positions.

By the end of the day, the Soviet attack had been repelled, but the casualties were enormous. If another attack were to come the next day, the situation was certain to be hopeless without fresh reinforcements. General Jány at 8:45 PM requested the urgent relocation of the "Cramer Corps", or at least his own Hungarian Armor Division, to the troubled area. General Weichs agreed to General Jány's request, but he had to obtain Hitler's permission to issue the order. Late that night Gen. Major Gyula Kovács, chief of operations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, received a reply from Army Group B headquarters; "No decision has been reached yet". Consequently, there were no reserve forces available to repel any new possible attacks.

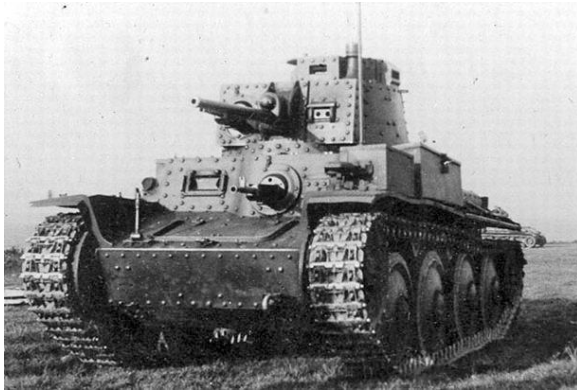
Since there were no fresh reserves available, General Jány had to pull five battalions from



**Gen. Jány (center) conferring with his general staff. At right: Gen. Gyula Kovács, chief of operations.**

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

elsewhere to organize a strike force, because the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment suffered devastating casualties and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment was also down to 60% strength. The strike force was supposed to be supported by the 700<sup>th</sup> German Tank Troop. The Hungarian infantry, under the command of Colonel Martsa moved out early in the morning and by 9 AM reached its first objective. Due to some communication problem however, the German tanks did not get into action until 9:30 AM then they met head on with the 150<sup>th</sup> Russian Tank Brigade. The German Panzers were outnumbered, outclassed and outgunned by the new Soviet T-34



**The PzKpfw 38(t) German tank. Was not an effective opponent of the Soviet T-34.**

infantry was also pushed back by overwhelming enemy forces.

Meanwhile, the Russians directed their artillery fire on the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Captain Mátray commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion gave the following report:

*"The artillery fire is at its maximum. The men are taking it with unprecedented calmness. Breakfast distribution is according to schedule."*<sup>16</sup>



**Gen Jány on an inspection tour**

heavy casualties. On the place of the ill-fated counter attack however, Russian armor and infantry was pouring through in great numbers to the rear of the Hungarian lines. With the breakthrough,



**Col. v. Sándor Martsa C.O. of the 47th Inf. Regiment. Commanded the brave but unsuccessful counterattack at Uryw**

These newer model T-34 tanks were upgraded from a 76.3 mm. gun to an 85 mm gun and the maximum hull armor was increased from 47 mm. to 60 mm. In contrast the German tanks were the PzKpfw 38(t) type with a 37 mm. gun and maximum hull armor 25 mm.

In a one-hour tank battle the Germans lost 56 of their 60 tanks. The Remainder of the German tanks then pulled back. The unsupported Hungarian

When the artillery barrage expired, a new Russian human wave attacked that pushed 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions out of their positions. First Lt. Szalay of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion then commanded assault, in bloody hand-to-hand combat the battalion retook its position however the brave Lieutenant Szalay was killed. In a similar bold counter attack, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion retook its lost position also, where First Lieutenant Bondor led the charge. In the meanwhile, the enemy broke into the artillery positions, where fierce close combat developed. First Lieutenant Holzschuster wounded by two bullets, and Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel László Darnay, who was killed, led the ferocious fight.

Although by the end of the day the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and the field artillery had fought off the Russian attack, they suffered exceedingly

<sup>16</sup> Ref.: Nemeskürthy: *Requiem egy hadseregért.* (Requiem for an Army.) Magvető, Pub. 1972. Pg. 66

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

the Soviet forces were splitting the Hungarian Army in two, separating the III Corps on the northern flank, from the main body of the army. By that evening, the Russians had also encircled the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment in position south of the breakthrough. Therefore, after dusk with permission, the remainder of the regiment broke out with a bayonet assault and reached the villages of Soldackoje and Prilepi during the night. By the breakout the regiment was saved, however, the existing gap now grew even bigger for the Russians to pour through.

On this very same day, however, only 10 km. (6.2 miles) away, North of Uryw, there was relative quiet on the sector of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. Furthermore, the Hungarians took the initiative and sent several combat patrols across the Don. Most of these patrols returned with Soviet Prisoners and one of them, led by Lieutenant Faluvégi even returned with a captured Russian antitank gun and machine gun.



**A Hungarian defense position at Uryw**



**A returning reconnaissance patrol**



**Church service somewhere  
along the Don**



**Regrouping Hungarian Infantry**

## 2.8. The soviet offensive at Shtshutshje

Two days after the Uryw breakthrough at the bridgehead of Shtshutshje, a new Soviet attack occurred under almost ideal conditions for the aggressors. All the attention of the Hungarian Army was directed to the breakthrough at Uryw. General Jány himself was away that day from his command post in the Uryw area, trying to salvage what he could on the spot from the disastrous situation. That very day there was a snowstorm in the Shtshutshje area, which greatly limited the visibility of the troops and the temperature, dipped to 45 below zero.



**Advancing column of T-34 tanks**

At 5:40 AM a terrifying artillery barrage opened up on the sector held by 18<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> infantry Regiments of the 12<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Division. When the artillery fire ceased, the Russian tanks stood right on top of the Hungarian line. Here either the units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Tank Army or the XVIII. Independent Corps were attacking with overwhelming power. The Soviet infantry in great numbers in almost solid columns followed the tanks. The defense was hopeless from the start.

The antitank gunners and the artillery observers could not see more than a few yards, due to the snowstorm. The entire 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was engaged in close combat with the enemy. The commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Major Dancs after making a short speech to his men led them on a counter assault. During this assault, he was hit in his thigh and in his right arm, but he kept on. In its surprise counter attack, the battalion took some 400 Russian prisoners. One of the company commanders, First Lieutenant Sári was wounded and taken prisoner by the Russians. When his company saw what happened, they launched a new assault and freed their wounded company commander. Against incredible odds, the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment hung on to its second line of defense, about 3 km (1.9 miles) to the rear. During the course of the day however, the regiment suffered devastating heavy casualties and lost most of its officers.

The 48<sup>th</sup> Regiment was even more unfortunate. Its 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions were overrun during the morning hours. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion could hold its position until 10 a.m., then as a last resort battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Horvay in desperation led a suicide assault in which he himself was killed also. The regiment was practically eliminated, and by the next day there were 200 men left of the 1600 men regiment. In other words, during the course of one single day the regiment suffered 87.8% casualties.

12<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery regiment also fought with extraordinary heroism from the city of Tolna. They destroyed nine T-34 tanks and when the Russians reached their gun positions, they fought a desperate and bloody hand-to-hand combat, not letting a single able gun fall into the hands of the enemy. Out of the 38 officers of the regiment, 11 were killed in action during the day and 3 were seriously wounded, one of whom saved the regiment's colors. The total casualties of the regiment were 75% by the end of the day, but as long as there were able-bodied men in the gun positions, they held them.

In spite of the great sacrifices, by the end of the day the remnants of the 12<sup>th</sup> Division could

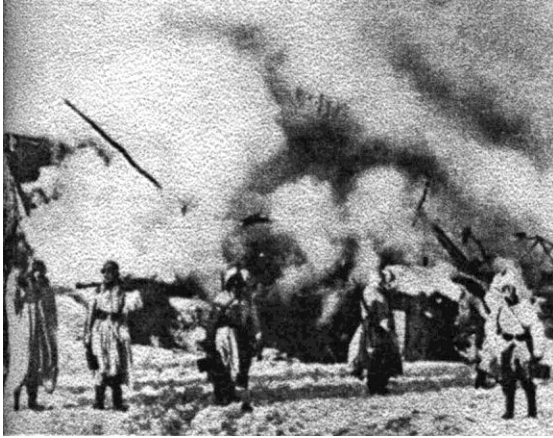


**Tank born Russian infantry**

no longer repel the Russian onslaught, although a reserve battalion of the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in a “porcupine” position under the command of Lt. Col. Medics held out till the end of the following day.

## 2.9. Valiant attempt

Jan. 15<sup>th</sup> was the critical day for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Gen. Jány requested permission to pull his army back. He believed that with an organized retreat he could establish a line of defense along the



**Counterattacking Hungarian infantry**

River Oskol. Otherwise, the remaining units of the army would have been encircled by the Soviet troops pouring through at Uryw and Shtshutshje. Army Group B headquarters with the familiar phrase denied permission: “Es muss ausgehalten werden.” (It must be held.) (Of course, what else could be expected from Hitler, when he was willing to sacrifice his own 6<sup>th</sup> Army at Stalingrad with the same amateur military philosophy?) Gen. Jány knew that this would bring the certain destruction of the army. He himself was prepared to die with his men. He called each of his field commanders, calling them by their first names and informed them of the grim situation. He then flew to III Corps headquarters where he met

with the commanding general of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army and placed the III Corps under the care of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army Command since it was evident that by the Uryw break through the III Corps will be cut off from the main body of the Hungarian army. (Actually, this was a fatal mistake, the III



**Retreat on the endless Russian snowfields**

Corps would have been much better off to be left on his own.) Upon his return, he has prepared himself for the certain end; he placed in a pouch his wedding ring, his watch, notebook, diary and prayer book with instruction to be given to his wife in the event of his death.

Gen. Jány's faith however denied him a soldier's death. A few years later in Soviet occupied Hungary he had to die a martyr's death by the hands of the “People's Court.”

There are some, who say now that if Gen. Jány saw the hopeless situation he should have pulled back anyway while he could. The answer is simple; Gen. Jány was too good of a soldier to disobey orders and for that matter, so were his men.

What can be said about OKH (the German High Command) which did not have any emotional sympathy for the Hungarian troops anyway? They just followed Hitler's orders, because no



## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

one there had the guts to stand up to the “great military genius of the Führer”.

The Cramer Corps, which was sitting idle watching the deadly combat for 6 days finally received Hitler's permission to go into action, and from this “too little too late” expected Army group B headquarters to reverse the situation. Hitler and the OKH forgot the golden rule that every good sergeant should know: if the enemy takes your position, you do not allow to make himself at home there, but use every available means to throw him out as soon as possible. By waiting for something, “bigger” to happen the OKH, but most of all the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had to pay very dearly for the mistake and the lost time.



**Maj. Gen. János Legeza**  
commanded successfully the  
VII. Corps during the most  
critical phase of the 1942-43  
winter campaign

The VII Corps was torn into three segments by the breakthrough at Shtshutshje. The Corps commander, Gen. Maj. János Legeza decided on a last effort to save the Corps. He personally took command of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, which was originally assigned, to the IV Corps, and ordered a counter attack across the Don. While this counter attack was a surprise to the Russians but as they soon discovered the very modest strength of the attack, it was repelled and it could not produce an appreciable effect. Nevertheless, this valiant attempt at least temporarily slowed down the Russian onslaught.

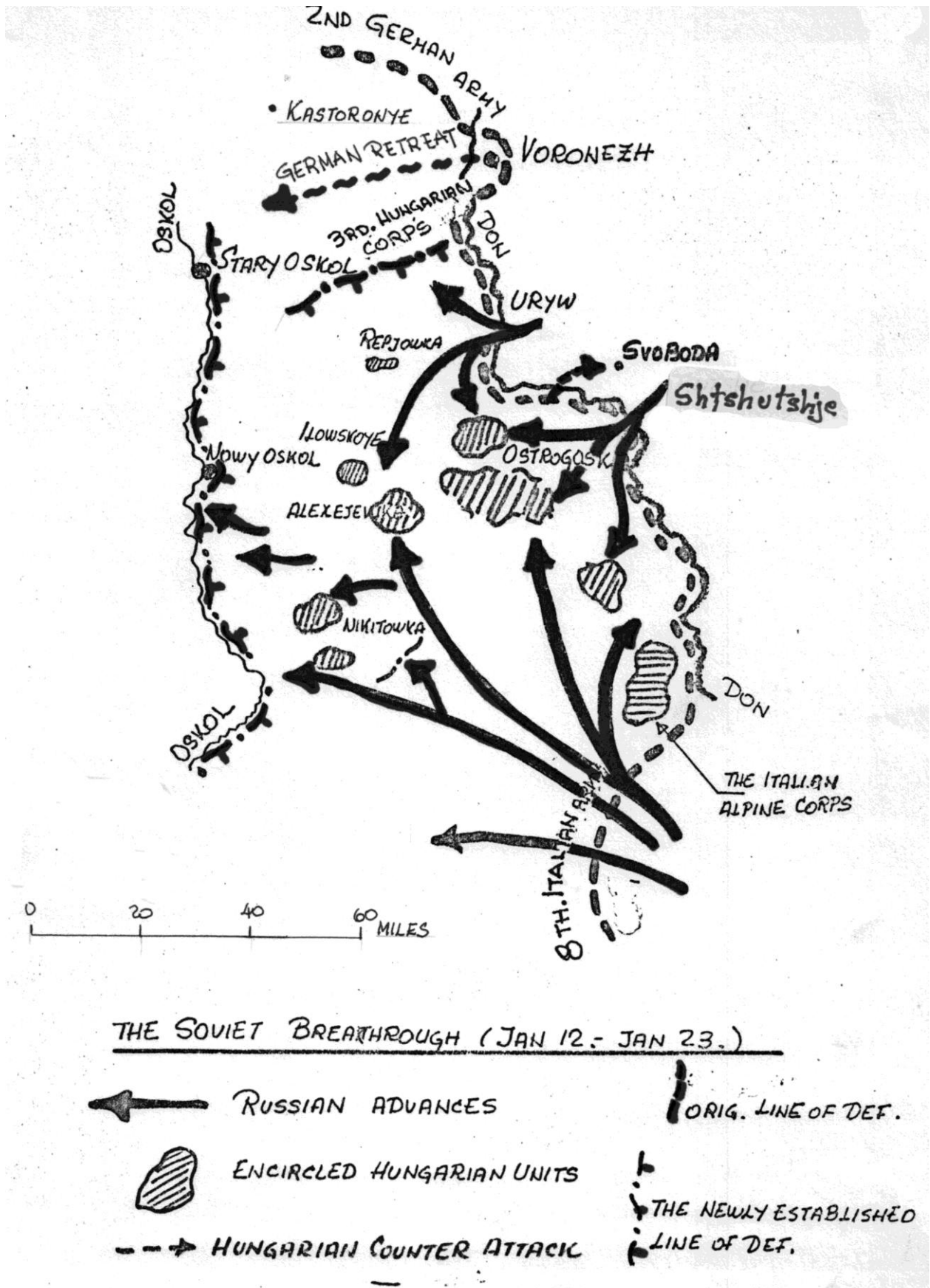
In five days, by Jan. 17<sup>th</sup>, the Soviets were behind the lines everywhere and most of the units were encircled, or at least the supplies and communication lines were cut. The remnants of the units had run out of all food, ammunition and medical supplies. Any kind of continuous organized resistance was no longer possible, and the men began their march back toward the River Oskol. Napoleon's retreat could have been like this, except for pursuing Cossacks there were the pursuing T-34 tanks. Long columns of destitute men, marching on the endless snowfield, keeping their eyes looking for the dreaded T-34 monsters. Most of the men still in their khaki colored uniforms were easy targets on the white snowfields. Those who could not keep up and fell behind were certain to die. Food, ammunition, heavy weapons, (because there was no means to move them) were long gone, just the merciless cold and the pursuing Russians.



**An army in retreat**



## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY



## 2.10. Islands of defense.

(Ostrogosk, Ilowskoje, Nowy Oskol.)



**A last stand**

442<sup>nd</sup> German Infantry Regiments from the 168<sup>th</sup> German Division, and some other smaller units. By Jan. 16<sup>th</sup> these units had been completely surrounded by the Soviet troops. Gen. Major Hollósy-Kuthy, the commander of the 13<sup>th</sup> Division, assumed the command of these units. The encircled troops received orders through the staff of the 168<sup>th</sup> German Division that “Es muss ausgehalten werden.” (It must be held). The German order promised supplies through airdrops. Although the Russians had sent several captured Hungarian and German soldiers with surrender offer into the town, the defenders held out and fought off the strongest Soviet attacks for four days. By Jan. 19<sup>th</sup>, it was evident that there would be no supplies or help of any kind, and orders were given to break out after dark.

The Hungarian column was spearheaded by the remainder of the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment and a battalion of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commanded by Col. Rummy. The spearhead was organized into two combat groups, one commanded by Lt. Col. Szűcs of approx. 320 men and the other commanded by Capt. Duska of approx. 580 men. The rear guard was the remainder of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, commanded by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Fehér.



**Capt. v. László Duska, led the breakout at Ostrogosk**

On the morning of Jan. 20<sup>th</sup>, as Capt. Duska's group was advancing on the small railroad station at the village of Inyuto, they drew sudden heavy mortar and machinegun fire, and at the same time Russian infantry was developing for an attack. Capt. Duska threw the first machinegun into position and returned the fire. Soon afterwards the other Hungarian machineguns opened up also. The Russians quickly retreated, but the next moment a mortar shell exploded next to the captain, wounding him on the forehead, shoulder and chest. His face covered with blood and wounded, Capt. Duska continued to lead his men. Seeing that the Russian heavy weapons concen-

tration was to the west, he changed directions to the southwest to bypass it. Then he led an assault with the also wounded Maj. Mamusich. A German unit also joined the group and followed Capt. Duska.<sup>17</sup> The quick and bloody assault was successful and the group broke through the Russian ring, paving the way for the rest of the troops.

About 400 airmen had been organized into an infantry combat unit and were defending the airfield and the important road junction at Ilowskoje under the command of Lt. Col. Csukás and Maj. Heppes. At the airfield, they had been surrounded under heavy siege since Jan. 15<sup>th</sup>. The units

<sup>17</sup> Capt. Duska was decorated with the “Golden Medal of Bravery” for his action at Ostrogosk. In time sequence he was the 4<sup>th</sup> officer to receive that decoration.

that broke out at Ostrogosk on their way lifted the siege of the airfield, but not before the defenders had suffered very heavy casualties including Col. Csukás, who was killed in action on Jan 18<sup>th</sup>.

On the banks of the Oskol a new line of defense had been established by reorganizing the arriving groups into combat teams with the available equipment. An approximated 17,000 men force had been assembled under the command of Gen. Major Gyula Vargyassy, the commander of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division. This “ad hoc” force defended the town of Nowy Oskol until Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>, when they were relieved by the freshly arrived German “Gross Deutschland” Panzer Division.

## 2.11. The rear guard action of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Armored Division

While the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army was engaged in its deadly combat with the enemy, the reserve force of the army group, the “Cramer Corps” was standing idle waiting for orders. This reserve force consisted of three rested divisions, the 26<sup>th</sup> and the 168<sup>th</sup> German Divisions, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Armored Division, although the Hungarian Armored Division fought in the bloody bridge-head battles during the early fall. The German General Hans Cramer commanded the Corps. The OKH finally gave its consent to the deployment of this Corps on January 18<sup>th</sup>, six days after Uryw breakthrough.



**Tanks of the Hungarian Armored Division going into action. These Panzer IV tanks were inferior to the Soviet T-34s, because their maximum hull armor was 30mm. as opposed to 47 and later 60mm. of the T-34s. But their 75mm. guns were capable of knocking them out.**

When the Corps finally began its operation, the situation had deteriorated so much that it was, nothing but wishful thinking to expect this single Corps could repel two attacking Russian armies.

If this Corps could have gone into action as one unified battle force six days earlier while the troops were holding their original positions along the Don, the Russians perhaps would not have broken through or even if they would have done so, they certainly could not have completed such quick pincer movements. The Soviet command had provided a golden opportunity for quick moving reserve force to move from one troubled area to another, since they let two days elapse between their attack at Uryw and the one at Shtshutshje. Above

all, a serious tactical error was committed by Army Group B, by not committing the armored unit to battle sooner since the best antitank weapon is another tank and the fighting Hungarian divisions had not had a single tank on the front line in these six crucial days. All of the Hungarian armored units had to wait for orders from the Cramer Corps Command to move out. The Soviets on the other hand broke through on both places with a large tank force. When the Cramer Corps and consequently the Hungarian Armored Division finally began their operation, all they could do was to provide a rear guard action along a wide front sector instead of being a powerful strike force. At this late stage it could only slow down the Russian advance.

The first task assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division by Gen. Cramer was to retake the towns of Nikolajewka and Alexeyevka. In order to accomplish the task, the troops suddenly were ordered back to a staging area. To reach that area, the troops had to move through overcrowded and jammed roads among the other retreating units. By moving to the carelessly selected staging area, precious time was lost. Nevertheless, the units of the Armored Division under the command of Colonel Horvath retook Nikolajewka by the morning of Jan. 18<sup>th</sup> without much difficulty.

In Alexeyevka, however, there was a vicious house-to-house street battle. In two and half-hours they retook the town and by that evening they pushed the Soviets back to Burden. The objective was to hold Alexeyevka until the retreating columns move.

On Jan. 19<sup>th</sup> the Armored Division pulled out of Alexeyevka by taking up positions around the village of Glinka with orders to hold until further orders. These orders were by Gen. Cramer, and repeated personally, by Gen. Jány himself.

On Jan. 20<sup>th</sup>, Gen. Cramer ordered the division into attack again in order to relieve the pressure on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 168<sup>th</sup> German Divisions, which were breaking out of a Russian encirclement. On the next day Gen. Cramer notified the div. commander, Col. Horvath that the division broke out from their encirclement.

On Jan. 21<sup>st</sup> some of the units of the division under the command of Lt. Col. Resch conducted a daring counterattack in which they captured 1 enemy tank, 2 trucks, 2 antitank guns, 5 machine guns, 7 submachine guns, 1 heavy weapon, numerous rifles and ammunition, and recaptured a Hungarian anti-aircraft gun. The men counted 50 Russian casualties. Their own casualties: 1 dead and 4 wounded.

On this very same day, Gen. Jány appeared unexpectedly alone in his staff car at Iljinka. After a short briefing, he went forward among the fighting men without saying much to anyone. Many of the men had the impression that he was looking for a soldier's death.

By the night of Jan 21<sup>st</sup>, the Soviet troops had reached the village, so during the night and the next day there was bitter, fluctuating street battle in the village. By nightfall, orders had been received to pull back as the rearguard unit of the 168<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> German Divisions.

As the rearguard, the Armored Division reached Nowy Oskol by Jan. 24<sup>th</sup>, where it was subordinated to Gen. Maj. Vargyassy, the commander of the Hungarian forces in the area. As stated before, these Hungarian forces defended Nowy Oskol until Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>, when they were pulled back and the newly arrived "Gross Deutschland" German Division took over the defense sector. On Jan 29<sup>th</sup> the Armored Division was subordinated to a German command again, and was ordered to the village of Michajlowa with the objective to secure the flank of the "Gross Deutschland" Division.

The Armored Division held the village till Feb. 4<sup>th</sup> during which time it again conducted several counterattacks. It was here that Col. Horváth received the news of his promotion to general major. On Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> the division received orders to secure the withdrawal of the 168<sup>th</sup> German Division. During this rearguard action the troops were engaged in heavy combat in the vicinity of Dalnaja and Iguylnka. In these sometimes close-range and hand-to-hand combat Lt. Col. Szigetváry was also wounded seriously in the abdomen.

On Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> at the village of Woltschansk the division lost its last tank. Coincidentally on this day the Armored Division was ordered back to Charkow for a rest period. The units reached the city by nightfall and with that concluded their 22 days rearguard action.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Armored Division was the fighting rear guard of not only the Hungarian troops but for the 168<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> German Divisions as well. During these 22 days, always outnumbered by the pursuing Russians, this high-spirited elite unit showed extraordinary courage under the most severe conditions. It not only slowed down the Soviet advance, but with its daring counter attacks even scored temporary victories during the prevailing despair.

## **2.12. The tragic struggle of the III Corps.**

With the Soviet break through at Uryw on Jan. 12<sup>th</sup>, it became very probable that the III Corps could be cut off from the main body of the Hungarian army. Gen. Jány flew to III Corps Headquarters on Jan. 14<sup>th</sup> to meet with Gen. Hans von Salmuth, the commanding general of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German army. In a two-hour conference they agreed to attach the III Corps as of Jan. 15<sup>th</sup> to the joining 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army since the front held at the junction point. On that day General Friedrich Siebert the commander of the neighboring German VII Corps, appeared at Corps headquarters and

informed General Major Marcell Stomm, Corps commander that the German command decided to form a "Corps Group" under his command and as of now General Stomm is subordinated to him. Siebert just gave orders without giving any briefing to Gen. Stomm at all, and from this point on a strained relationship existed between them. Had the German army command accepted the Hungarian Corps commander as an equal instead putting him in a humiliating position, much difficulty could have been avoided.

General count Marcell Stomm, was a highly educated officer, a fine gentleman, and a respected well liked commanding officer. He cared a great deal for his men. He spoke fluent German and English. In the pre-war years he served as a military attaché in London and in Washington.

First of all, Gen. Siebert ordered Gen. Stomm to pivot his line back by ninety degrees from the Don to a southern direction along the Semidesyatskoye-Rutkin line to secure the southern flank of the retreating German troops out of Voronezh. (The Germans were evacuating the city on the eastern bank of the Don) leaving only the 9<sup>th</sup> Division on the Don up to the pivot point. Gen. Siebert promised that the German withdrawal would be completed by Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> after which the Hungarians would get their well-deserved rest. However, when Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup> came Gen. Siebert asked for another day, and on Jan. 24<sup>th</sup> another day, then came Jan. 25<sup>th</sup>.

On Jan. 25<sup>th</sup> the Soviet offensive began its second phase: the encirclement and the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army. The "Briansk Front Sector" under the command of Russian Gen. Reyter was conducting the offensive with three attacking Russian armies, the 60<sup>th</sup> commanded by Gen. Ivan Chernyakhovski, the 38<sup>th</sup> commanded by Gen. Tshibishov, and the 13<sup>th</sup> commanded by Gen. Pukhov. On the defense sector of the III Corps the 50<sup>th</sup> or 40<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was attacking. Of course, the III Corps now tactically was part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army.

Actually, the Russians had opened their main offensive on Jan. 24<sup>th</sup>, probably to force a breakthrough on the southern flank to cut off the troops at the Don. Although the attacking Russians were in great numerical superiority, they could not make any gains at all on the 24<sup>th</sup> and on the 25<sup>th</sup>, most probably because tanks did not reinforce them. It must be mentioned here that these Hungarian units had not had any time to dig into the frozen ground, and they were in their positions on the icy snow day and night without any shelter, in the -40 degree temperature. Casualties due to the cold were just as great as the battle casualties.

The main elements of the defense were composed of the following positions:

- On the banks of the Don, elements of the 9<sup>th</sup> Inf. Division under the command of Col. Oszlányi, turning south;
- the battle group of Col. Martsa, the C.O. of the 47<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regiment,
- west from that the battle group of Lt. Col. Tavassy of the field gendarmerie.<sup>18</sup>
- in addition, on the right flank several smaller units under the command of the Corps artillery commander, Gen. Major László Descó.

These "Ad Hoc" units in heroic battles with the elements and with the superior enemy forces held off the Russians for twelve days.

By Jan. 26<sup>th</sup> the German troops successfully evacuated Voronezh, but Gen. Siebert did not



**Lt. Field Marshal Count Marcell Stomm, commanding general of the III. Hungarian Corps during the most desperate phase of the Don winter battle.**

<sup>18</sup> Same as field military police.



**Col. v. Kornél Oszlányi (later Gen. Major), commanded the „rearguards of rearguards” at the Don**

pull the III Corps back, nor did he send any reinforcements to the Hungarian troops. Finally on Jan. 27<sup>th</sup> he gave permission to the Hungarians to pull back. On that day, the last German troops retreating from Voronezh were already 30 km. from the Don, but the most northern division of the III Corps, the 9<sup>th</sup> Division, was still locked in a deadly combat on the Don.

By this time there were no German Italian or Romanian soldiers on the Don at all, just the Hungarian 9<sup>th</sup> Division as the rearguards of rearguards. The division commander Col. Kornel Oszlányi <sup>19</sup> himself fighting in close combat with a submachine gun in his hands, was wounded by two bullets. Lt. Col. Rözsey, commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment under similar conditions was killed in action shortly before that. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was down from its original strength of approx. 3000 men on Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25 officers and 450 enlisted men. Another example; the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment was down to a total of 17 men. On Jan. 28<sup>th</sup> the Soviet troops broke through the German lines around Kastoronje, and completed

the encirclement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army also. The only way back from now on was to break through the Russian ring.

As an historical fact, it should be noted that the last rearguard units of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division had left the Don on Jan. 29<sup>th</sup> 17 days after the break-through at Uryw.

As the units began their retreat, as the last unit to move out anywhere, the German-controlled supplies, food, ammunition and gasoline dwindled to nothing. Due to the lack of gasoline the remaining vehicles had to be abandoned, even Gen. Stomm's staff car. Surprisingly enough, somehow the German vehicles were moving. The only means remaining to the Hungarians were horse drawn sledges. All the primary roads were assigned to the use of the German troops. The Hungarian columns very often had to push their way through off roads, in 3 feet of snow, and by the time they got the designated areas, all the shelters were usually taken by the Germans, who had gotten there first. During the night they could not even build fires to warm themselves up due to the enemy air activity. These destitute men, generals, officers, enlisted men all alike were outdoors day and night in the -40 degree temperature. Many ugly incidents and armed conflict developed with the Germans.

Exhausted small Hungarian groups and lost stragglers were ambushed by the Germans and the Hungarian's supplies and warm clothing were taken away. Insult were common place such as “schweine Ungarn” (Hungarian pigs) by the Germans. It seemed that suddenly the former ally became the worst enemy.

On Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> the remnants of the III Corps reached the valley of the Olym. On that day Gen. Stomm received orders from Gen. Siebert to break out in the Northwest direction toward Livini. Gen. Stomm knew that was a suicide mission, since in that direction was the heaviest Russian troop concentration. A few days earlier a German attempt failed there with very heavy casualties. Then came the straw that broke the camel's back. - Gen. Stomm allegedly came in to possession a secret



**Many who froze to death**

<sup>19</sup> Col. Oszlányi, later promoted to Gen. Major was the most highly decorated Hungarian soldier during the war, he received the Knight's Cross of The Order of Maria Theresia.



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order, by Siebert to the German field commanders. According to this, Gen. Siebert put the blame for the collapse of the entire Don Front on the Hungarian troops and ordered that the Hungarians should be treated as enemy POWs. This order explained all of the German behavior towards the Hungarian troops.



**An army in retreat**

Then on Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943, General Count Marcell Stomm issued his last order to his troops. The English translation of the original Hungarian original text reads as follows:

*"The Royal Hungarian Honvéd III Corps since Jan. 12<sup>th</sup> has been engaged in heavy combat, demanding exceedingly large casualties for the possession of its position along the Don. Since the break-through at Uryw it has been separated from the main body of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Hungarian Army and has been subordinated to the Siebert Corps Group. In that subordination it has secured the necessary 12 days delay for the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army's withdrawal*

*In the battles the Hungarian troops gave evidence of superhuman bravery. The ever increasing ammunition shortage, food supply shortage and the exceedingly cold weather however broke the strength of the defenders. From this minute on we were only burden to the German leadership. Reporting the prevailing conditions I have repeatedly asked my superior commander to pull my troops out for a rest period and regrouping. Unfortunately, this has never happened. Instead you had to endure without ammunition, food and shelter on the bare snow, suffering the Russian winter nights.*

*I have seen how your physical and mental strength dwindled away and how we are all heading to certain destruction. The German leadership in its difficult position does not seem to be able to supply even the basic food necessities to us.*

*As of today, I have received orders from Gen. Siebert to lead you west of the Olym creek, where we can break through toward the west. To break through that Russian Army through which the fully equipped and fully capable (rested) German divisions have failed before. Such an order I cannot pass on to you, it is senseless to have thousands starved and destitute Hungarians die with each having only ten bullets left.*

*The German leadership in the past has said that it will take in those Honvéds (Hungarian soldiers) who are willing to serve with them, and will give them equal care with those of the other nationalities who are doing the same (for them.)*

*It has happened before in the history of the Hungarian people that under the leadership of brave commanders the units broke through and reached unbelievable far places.*

*Therefore, I have to give each man the power to decide his own destiny, since I cannot give you food or ammunition.*

*The country will always remember her brave sons, to whose fate a similar one has touched only a few in the Hungarian Nation. God be with you, Hungarian Honvéds (soldiers).*

*General-Major Count Stomm, Corps Commander."* <sup>20</sup>

(Lt. Field Marshal Stomm was already in captivity, when he has learned of his promotion)



**The wounded returning from the Don**

<sup>20</sup> Ref. dálnoki Veress: „Magyarország honvédelme .." op.cit, Vol. I, pp. 405, 406.



**Capt. v. Antal Radnóczy, leading his group broke through the Russian ring near Kastoronje**

The above order contained an appendix in which Gen. Stomm stated that following German orders would mean certain destruction. He advised the formation of smaller groups, since these would have a better chance of getting through the Russian ring.

The dramatic words of Gen. Stomm's last orders well reflect the ordeal of the troops and the psychological anguish of their commanding general over the hopeless situation. Gen. Stomm had to choose between obeying orders or disobeying them in order to save human lives, but to face a possible court martial and disgrace. He chose the latter.

While Gen. Stomm exonerated his troops of following German orders anymore, in protest he did not absolve himself. After he said farewell, he set out with a small group of about sixty men and a few horse drawn sledges, armed with only small arms in the direction ordered by Siebert. On Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> a T-34 tank decimated the group to seven officers and 18 enlisted men and destroyed all the sledges. On Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup> the small group was surprised by a Soviet cavalry patrol and captured. Among the captured was also Gen. Major Deseő. Credit must be given to the Soviet captors that they did not ill-treat the generals or the others. In his captivity both of Gen. Stomm's feet had to be amputated due to the frostbite he had suffered, and the Russians must be given credit for saving his life.

Following Gen. Stomm's advice there were many small groups formed which attempted the break-through. As of today we have records of the following groups successfully fighting their way through incredible odds and reaching the main body of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army, over 200 miles away.

- Group A. commanded by Col. Martsa of the 47<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regiment
- Group B. commanded by Col. Farkas of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Regiment
- Group C. commanded by Col. Rabacs of the 20<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment
- Group D. commanded by Maj. Kern chief of operations 20<sup>th</sup> Division
- Group E. commanded by Maj. Barra of the 20<sup>th</sup> Division
- Group F. commanded by Capt. Szilágyi of the 20<sup>th</sup> Hussar troop
- Group G. commanded by Capt. Radnóczy<sup>21</sup> of the Corps quarter master unit.

Credit must be given to Gen. Gollwitzer, the commander of the 88<sup>th</sup> German Inf. Division, who had given some aid and supplies to some of these Hungarian units.

In these groups an estimated 5000 to 6000 men reached the Hungarian staging areas which number constituted about 10% of the original manpower of the Corps.

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<sup>21</sup> Captain vitéz Antal Radnóczy lived in Germany after the war, where he headed up the émigré faction of the Knightly Order of Vitéz, and after the collapse of Communism he was instrumental in the early years of the nineties in repatriating this organization to the homeland.

### 2.13. Conclusion

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army's casualties during the 1942/43 winter were enormous; as a matter of fact they were so great, that in manpower and in material, the entire Hungarian Army could not recuperate from it totally. The estimated losses were: 45,000 killed 45,000 wounded, 28,000 captured by the Russians, of whom a great number died due to malnutrition and diseases.<sup>22</sup> Considering the total number of 207,000 men originally, the total casualty was 57%.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army however was far from being totally destroyed, as many ill informed historians would like to have us believe. While the Soviet troops certainly; made large territorial gains, their casualty rates were even higher than that of the defenders, which is evidenced by the fact that they could not pursue any further. As a matter of fact the Wehrmacht took next initiative in March, it took Kharkov on March 15<sup>th</sup> and pushed to Red Army back to the Donetz. It was till July 12<sup>th</sup> when Red Army commenced its next major offensive, which culminated in the Battle of Kursk. They had failed also in their much-quoted objective, the “total destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army”.

The following statistics prove the point: As of March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1943, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's assembly area in the vicinity of the town Sumi the following manpower strength and equipment had been recorded.

- 3,000 officers
- 60,000 enlisted men (The wounded is not included in these figures)
- 3,000 pistols
- 40,000 rifles
- 900 submachine guns
- 370 automatic rifles
- 250 machineguns
- 3 105-mm artillery pieces
- 2 100-mm artillery pieces
- 28 100 mm mortars
- 4 750 mm antitank guns
- 10 heavy infantry rifles
- 14,000 horses and 7,000 vehicles
- 1,250 motor vehicles

With the exception of the Armored Division, the manpower had been reorganized into new units and became part of the Hungarian Occupational force under the command of Lt. Field Marshal Szilárd Bakay.<sup>23</sup> The Armored Division of approx. 9000 men began its rail transportation back to Hungary on March 26, 1943.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's reorganization time, Gen. Jány and Gen. Kovács visited the “Heeresgruppe Mitte” (Center Army Group) Headquarters at Smolensk. Gen. Jány was received by Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, while Gen. Kovács and Gen. von Wöhler conducted separate discussions. In particular, Gen. Kovács in an open and frank discussion, brought up all the Hungarian complaints and in unmistakable and very strong words described the German behavior during the “Don disaster.”

Probably as a result of the discussion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army headquarters issued a secret or-

<sup>22</sup> Ref. *Hadak Útján*: Op. Cit. May - June issue, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Lt. Field Marshal Bakay has been kidnapped by the German Gestapo in Budapest in 1944, since he was involved in Regent Horthy's armistice attempt. After the Russian occupation of Hungary the Communist controlled People's Court also imprisoned Gen. Bakay.

der to its field commanders in 28 copies under the number “Ia Nr. 322/43”. titled “Our relationship to the Royal Hungarian Army”. In this order from the German point of view, but with relative objectivity the German headquarters explained the conditions under which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army fought, and instructed the German troops to give the proper respect to the Hungarian allies. This order also credit to the Hungarian troops as follows:

*“We must recognize the fact that at certain places there was long and hard resistance. As in the case of the 20<sup>th</sup> Light Division at Storoshevoj, the 13<sup>th</sup> Light Division at Ostrogosk, and the 19<sup>th</sup> Light Division at Marki. Most probably we can add to these examples later as we will learn more about the situation.”*

From a historical point of view, this German order provides some satisfaction to Gen. Siebert's secret orders and to his behavior, but it did not bring back to life the many thousands dead due to his actions.

Finally, we cannot pass over the story of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army without Gen. Jány's widely publicized army orders Ia No. 294-2, issued on Jan. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1943, during the greatest crisis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The derogatory harsh words used in the opening paragraph toward his troops were uncalled for and it haunted him for the rest of his life. Following that, the order states that order and iron discipline must be reestablished by all means, and all the command posts must remain on their locations until they receive orders to pull back. Of course except, its derogatory remarks, there is nothing unusual about this order; during the time of despair other generals have issued strongly worded orders also trying to pull their retreating troops together.

Very little publicity was given however to Gen. Jány's army orders issued on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1943, after all the facts were known. Two paragraphs of that order would be the most appropriate conclusion of the story of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

*“We can state proudly that the last soldier to leave the Don was the Hungarian “Honvéd” (soldier); the units of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division had left their original positions only on Jan. 26<sup>th</sup>, as the rearguards of rearguards of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army's rearguard to march to their designated area...*

*We hereby honor the thousands of dead and wounded. Praise and thanks shall accompany their names and those men too, whom the Almighty has led back after performing their duty with courage...”* <sup>24</sup>

*General Colonel vitéz Gusztáv Jány*

*Army Commander*

After the war Gen. Jány voluntarily returned from U.S. occupied Germany to Soviet occupied Hungary. Before his return this is what he told to a friend: “*I will go home to die as my soldiers did at the Don. They will execute me anyway, I know, but I will take the blame for everything so with my death I will exonerate the rest of my field commanders from persecution*” Upon his return to Hungary he was tried as a War Criminal. However, he was only 50% correct. They executed him by a firing squad, but his death did not exonerate anyone. Many of his field commanders were also persecuted and executed by the Communist controlled government of Hungary.

<sup>24</sup> Ref: dálnoki Veress: “Magyarország honvédelme ..” op.cit . Vol. I. pg. 425.

### **3. THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF HUNGARY.**

“The bitter chalice of Klessheim.”

Early in March 1944, Regent Horthy received an invitation from Hitler. Regent Horthy was apprehensive about the situation, but on the other hand, he wanted to talk to Hitler about the release of the Hungarian troops from the Russian Front and about reports that the German High Command consistently sacrificed Hungarian troops to cover the retreats. Shortly before Horthy's invitation President Tiso of Slovakia and Marshal Antonescu of Romania had also received invitations, which had made the invitation look somewhat innocent.

After long deliberations with the cabinet, Regent Horthy left Budapest on March 17, accompanied by Ghychy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gen. Csataj, Minister of Defense, and Gen. Szombathelyi, Chief of the General Staff. Horthy and Hitler met at the castle of Klessheim, one of Hitler's resort places in Bavaria. The Hungarian delegation was met at the railroad station as Horthy's train arrived by Hitler, Ribbentrop, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of the German High Command.

As Regent Horthy described in his memoirs the discussions between him and Hitler were somewhat nervous. Hitler started the discussions by talking about the Italian defection, and that he did not want to be surprised anymore. Finally Hitler's conversation led up to the fact that at this very same time German troops are on the way to occupy Hungary. After Hitler's statement Horthy's response was: *“If I am presented with final decisions already, I see no point for further discussions. I shall leave!”*<sup>25</sup>

With that Horthy left the room.

Hitler ordered a fake air alarm to prevent the Hungarian delegation from leaving, than persuaded Horthy to remain. The next day Horthy threatened to resign to signify his indignation over the German occupation, to which Hitler's reply was that in that case he would give a free hand to the Slovaks and Romanians over Hungary.

That afternoon Ribbentrop released a “communiqué” without Horthy's consent, which gave the impression that the German occupation of Hungary was the result of a joint agreement between Horthy and Hitler and that Horthy expressed hope that there would be no friction between the Hungarian troops and the German Allies.

Later Hitler made the following statement to Horthy: *“I give you my word that I shall withdraw the German troops as soon as there is such a cabinet in Hungary that I can trust.”*<sup>26</sup> (After the formation of the new cabinet the German troops were not withdrawn, just reduced in number. )

In his memoirs Regent Horthy refers to the Klessheim meeting as the *“Bitter chalice of Klessheim”* to signify his last and greatest disappointment in Hitler and the German allies.

Hungary's occupation was executed by eleven quick moving mechanized and panzer divisions. (It is amazing that at this stage of the war the Wehrmacht could pull together eleven much-needed frontline divisions for this purpose. )

The occupation was completed without any significant incidents, because the bulk of the Hungarian Army remaining within the country was concentrated away from the German border; it was in eastern Hungary close to the Soviet and Romanian borders. Regent Horthy and the delegation, the top military men of the country, were detained and allowed to leave Germany only after the occupation was completed. In reality Regent Horthy and the members of the delegation were de facto hostages during all this time.

The first German troops in Hungary were well-disciplined Wehrmacht units and credit must be given for their correct behavior. In the first few months of the occupation sport events and such

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<sup>25</sup> Ref. Horthy: *“Emlékirataim”* –( My Memoirs), Buenos Aires, 1953; pg. 252

<sup>26</sup> Ref. Horthy, op.cit. pg 253

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**Allied B-24 „Liberators” over Budapest**

as soccer games were organized between the Hungarian and German troops to create a friendly atmosphere and the Germans did not seem to interfere with the everyday life of the civilian population. As time passed however difficulties developed. On the heels of the Wehrmacht, Gestapo arrived who arrested a dozen members of the parliament and several leading political figures who were known for their pro Anglo sentiments. Eventually the bulk of the German troops left Hungary, but the exact number of them present in the country at any one time was very difficult to determine due to the con-

stant troop movements through-out the country. There seemed to be however always a heavy German troop concentration around the capital city of Budapest.

The German occupation of Hungary produced another very unfortunate side effect: the allied bombing raids over Hungary. The raids seemed to be directed against railroad yards, and the armament factories in Csepel, but they were done so indiscriminately that the civilian population suffered very much from them, as residential areas, hospitals, schools and churches were hit very frequently by the bombs. Later the Allies employed their “carpet bombing” techniques. This technique concentrated destruction over a few square miles; and was designed to create serious psychological impact on the population.



**Bombs are falling on Budapest**



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...and falling, followed by death and destruction



Devastation complete. St. Steven's basilica in the background

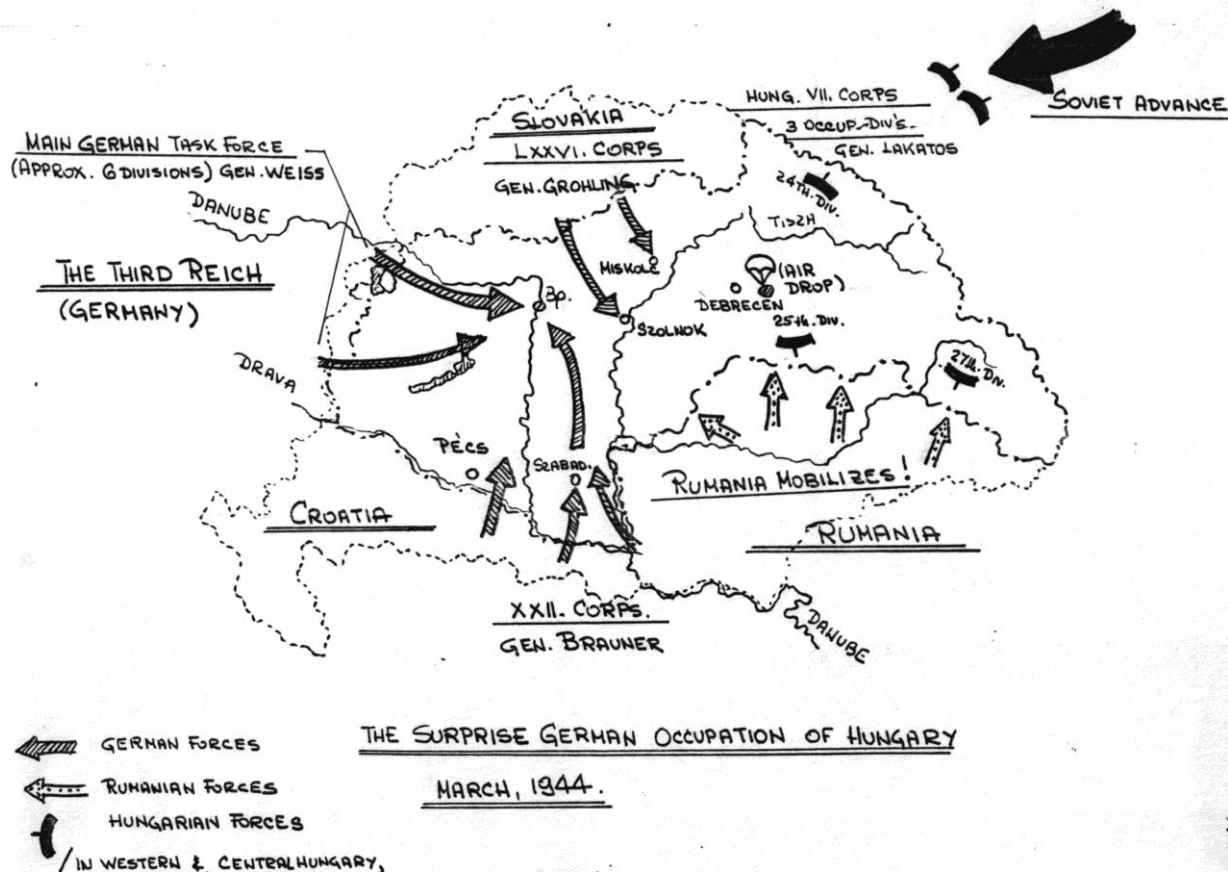


Bodies in the aftermath of the bombing raids

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Budapest after a carpet bombing raid





#### **4. THE HUSSARS.**

The story of the men of the Hussar Division how they held up the tradition the Hussars fighting far away, isolated from the other Hungarian troops.

1. The Traditions of the Hussars.
2. The Order of Battle of Hussar Division.
3. In the "Partisan country"
4. The Battle of Timkowicze and Kleck.
5. The Evasive Defense Action
6. The Jörgen "Supervision".
7. Under the command of the XXIII. German Corps.
8. In Battle of Warsaw.





#### 4.1. The tradition of the Hungarian hussars.

The Earliest record of the Hungarian cavalry is just as old as that of the Hungarian Nation. Byzantine emperor Leo IV (886 - 911 AD) have a lengthy description of the Hungarians in his book titled "Taktika". In his book Emperor Leo described the Hungarians as fierce and daring horsemen who moved on quick horses and always fought on horseback. Their main weapon was the bow and arrow, which they used with deadly accuracy from their galloping horses. They used their arrows equally well forward and backward. In their warfare they often employed false retreats to break up the enemy's formation and then turned on the enemy suddenly and unexpectedly. They always tried to lure the enemy to such a position that they could encircle it and in case of victory they pursued the enemy to the fullest extent. The estimated strength of the Hungarian fighting force was about 20,000 horsemen.

In the ninth and tenth centuries the Hungarian horsemen terrorized Europe; there are records of them of having been at Constantinople (Greece), Saint Gallen (Switzerland), and Brenta (Italy) and even as far as present day Holland. What the Vikings were on sea, these horsemen were on land.



During the process of taking up Christianity under Chieftain Géza (970 - 997) and his son Saint Stephen, first Christian king of Hungary (997 - 1038) these military adventures ceased and the Hungarian people turned to the Christian virtues and settled down to the prevailing European way of life in the Carpathian Basin. For many centuries to come, however, the main Hungarian fighting force remained the light cavalry. Good horsemanship always has been a virtue among the Hungarian men and the old art of horse breeding remains a proud tradition with the people.

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The word “*Huszár*”, allegedly originates from the early fifteenth century, when King Zsigmond (Sigismund, also Holy Roman Emperor) (1395 - 1437) decreed that one cavalryman has to be sent to the king's army for each twenty measures of land owned. *Húsz* meaning twenty in Hungarian and *ár* meaning Price) “*Huszár*” implies one owed to the king for twenty measures of land or “the price for twenty”. Since that time the people began to refer to the cavalymen as “*Huszár*”.



By the time of the Turkish liberation wars in Hungary during the seventeenth century the entire Hungarian cavalry was referred to as “*Hussars*”. Later in the Seven Year War between Prussia and the Habsburg Empire (1756 -1763) and during the Napoleonic Wars (1797 - 1813), the Hussars acclaimed such fame with their daring chivalry that most other European countries organized Hussar regiments in their armies, not only copying the Hussar cavalry tactics but their Hungarian style uniforms as well. By the end of the nineteenth century there were Hussar regiments in the German, French, British, Belgian, Dutch, Spanish and Russian armies.

Of course for many centuries the Hungarian cavalry constituted the Hussar regiments of the Habsburg Empire. The Hussars were regarded as Europe's one of most formidable cavalry and many foreign royalties and Habsburg princes had served at one time or another in one of the Hungarian Hussar regiments. The last Emperor-King of Austria-Hungary Charles had also served for a time with the Hussar regiment in the city of Sopron.

The fame of the Hungarian Hussars even reached the “New World”. A Hungarian Hussar, Colonel Michael Kováts was named to be “Master Of Exercises” of the cavalry brigade of the Pulaski Legion. On George Washington's recommendation, Congress named him to be Commander



**Best of friends. Hussar officer and his horse.**

Colonel of the American cavalry. Indeed, he is the father of the American Cavalry, who has fashioned and organized it following the traditions of the Hungarian Hussars. He was killed in action on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1779, leading a cavalry charge at Charleston. Another famous hussar in America was Colonel Charles Zágonyi who organized and commanded the Kentucky Cavalry during the Civil War.

His “Death Ride” at Springfield on Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>, 1861 acclaimed him his fame.



**Hussar officer with his cape.**

During World War I, wherever the Austro - Hungarian Army fought, the hussars were the daredevils of the battlefield. On the fields of Galicia (now part of Ukraine) they had earned the nickname “red devils”, associated with their red colored shakos and breeches.

The Hungarian Hussars, of course, were very much aware their traditions and every man considered it to be a privilege to be Hussar. They were bound together in a high “Esprit de Corps” and in good horsemanship.

#### 4.2. The order of battle of the Hussar Division.



Hussars in review

In 1940 there were four Hussar regiments in the Royal Hungarian Army. In the early part of 1944 the First Regiment had been reduced to squadron size and the other three regiments had been organized into a modern cavalry division, along with the First and Second Horse Artillery Squadrons. The horse artillery had had an “Esprit de Corps” on its own but equal

to that of the Hussars. These units had formed the nucleus of the division. Other “elite” units were added to the division; the Fifteenth Cyclist Battalion, the First Tank Squadron, the Third Mechanized Artillery Battalion, the Fiftieth Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, a medium (150 mm Howitzer) battery, a mechanized combat engineer company, an armored vehicle company and a signal Corps company.

Lt. Field Marshal Vattay had been appointed to be the commander of the division, General Major vitéz István Makay<sup>27</sup> was named to be the cavalry commander, and Colonel Kosa Reznek the artillery commander.



Line Officers Badge



Lt. Fld. Marshal v . Antal Vattay commanding  
general of the Hussar Division

<sup>27</sup> General Major Makay was killed in action early during the campaign by a Partisan mine.





THE RAIL TRANSPORTATION OF THE HUSSAR DIVISION  
TO THE RUSSIAN FRONT.

### 4.3. In the Partisan country.

In spite of the efforts of Regent Horthy, the government had to yield to German pressure, and the cavalry division was sent to the Russian front. Regent Horthy's final condition was that the division should be deployed on the northern flank of the Hungarian occupational forces. Hitler insisted on the deployment of the cavalry division and the 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Division on the secret request of Marshal Antonescu of Romania. Since these units were the last full strength divisions within Hungary, Antonescu was- concerned, -without any foundation- that Hungary might use these fresh divisions in an offensive to retake Southern Transylvania. Hitler wanted to ease his close friend's mind by appeasing him.

The units of the division began their rail transportation from Hungary in the early part of June, 1944. As the transport trains left the borders of Hungary they entered German-occupied territory. The trains were not directed to the northern flank of the Hungarian Occupational Army on the



A typical partisan group

front; instead they were diverted further north, to the town of Luninec, 355 km. (158 miles) east of Warsaw. This area was in the direct path of the main Soviet offensive directed toward Warsaw. After the arrival to Luninec, the units were ordered to march east toward the Pripyat Marshes, which area had been very heavily infested by Soviet Partisans. The German occupational forces were unable to control that area up to this time.

According to the received orders the division was subordinated to the Second German Army, commanded by Generaloberst (General Colonel) Weiss, who for the time being put the division

into army reserve. The designated bivouac area was along the Pripyat Marshes in "Partisan country".

The Third Hussar Regiment's area was the worst of all, which was in the "lion's den" due to the high crop fields and heavy brush.

The regiment's commander wanted to clear some of the area to establish a defense perimeter, but the German authorities forbade it, claiming it would have destroyed valuable crop. - Never mind the human lives it could have saved! -

According to the customs of Partisan warfare the Partisans were unseen during the daylight hours and always operated at night with their hit and run tactics. They had a radio network through which they coordinated hit and run attacks, established contact with the regular Soviet army, reported troop movements and directed Soviet air strikes.

The Partisan directed air strikes caused several casualties at least on two occasions.

On one occasion a four to five hundred man Partisan force succeeded in surprising one of the units of the Third Hussar Regiment. During the night fight one officer and four hussars were killed, another fifteen wounded, and about fifty horses were destroyed. On the next morning of the Partisan found corpses three wore German uniforms (of some sort) It was presumed that some of the Partisans posed as German soldiers to the guards, whom they approached.

After the initial impact, however the Partisan operations were far less effective against the Hungarian troops and perhaps for a long time to come it was a puzzle to many. The answer is actu-



Partisans ready for battle

ally quite simple: The Partisans had heavy radio traffic and they were quite confident no one listened to them.

They hardly ever used coded messages. What the partisans did not know there were quite a few Ruthenian speaking soldiers among the Hungarian troops. The Ruthenian language is very similar to the Russian; consequently these, men could understand most of what was said. One of the first things each Hungarian unit did was to set up a listening post and monitor the busy Partisan radio traffic. Consequently, the Hungarian troops were able to avoid much trouble.

A small episode may serve as a humorous example: The commanding officer of the Second Hussar Regiment was on an unannounced inspection tour of his troops. To much of his surprise, in the first village he came to, he found the unit commander waiting for him on the roadside. To his inquiry the unit commander gave an explanation with a smile: "Sir, we heard it on the Partisan radio that you were coming this way."

The Hussars conducted several mopping up operations through the swamps, each time rounding up a bunch of miserable-looking young men and women. These people were usually turned over to the German command post at Lachwa, where, not knowing what to do with them they were turned loose again.

#### 4.4. The battle of Timkowicze and Kleck.



On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1944, Field Marshall Model, commander of the German Center Army Group (of the Eastern Front), issued the following report to the German High Command.

"On a 350 km (155 miles) long front sector, the following enemy forces stand against our own troops: 126 infantry divisions, 45 tank brigades 17 mechanized brigades, 6 cavalry divisions. Our own combat strength 8 divisions, 194 units against 8"<sup>28</sup>

The main thrust of the Soviet force was directed toward Warsaw, along the Brest (Brest-Litovsk) Warsaw east-west line. This was the front sector that the Hussar Division had been quickly ordered to. The German High Command was hastily trying to assemble some reinforcements in the area. To the Kleck area, the Fourth German Cavalry Brigade and the Hungarian Hussar Division was ordered quickly to assemble with the Fourth German Panzer Division that was already on the front line. These troops formed a cavalry Corps under the command of General Harteneck.

The Hussar Division received from Corps headquarters three quickly changing regrouping

<sup>28</sup> dálnoki Veress: „Magyarország Honvédelme...” Op. Cit.

## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

orders. Each of the regrouping orders wasted valuable time and making tiring unnecessary marches. The Second Hussar Regiment and the Third Mechanized Artillery Battalion were taken away by the



**Hussar patrol**

German command from the division. They were ordered to reinforce the 4<sup>th</sup> German Brigade. The remainder of the division was to relieve the 4<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Division in the bridgehead position of Timkowicze.

General Harteneck planned a counter attack with his newly formed cavalry Corps.

He based his battle plan on German air reconnaissance reports. According to the plan, the Panzer Division was to strike north to the back of the enemy forces. The Hussar Division was to secure the east-

ern flank of the Panzer Division and the Fourth Cavalry Brigade was to take up defensive positions along the Moza Creek. The Hussar Division was formed into two combat teams, one in the vicinity of Timkowicze commanded by Colonel Schell and the other around the village of Lan commanded by Colonel Baintner. The division command post and the reserve forces were east of Meek in the town of Sinyavka..

Unfortunately, the air reconnaissance reports must have been erroneous on the locations of the Soviet troops. On duly as the attack opened up, the Panzers found very little resistance. Instead of moving into the back of the enemy it ran- into such a position that it was outflanked by the main Soviet force and could have been cut off. It was like if the Soviets laid-a trap for-the panzers. Fortunately, the Russian were too slow to capitalize on the situation. this was what saved the German panzers.

Instead of the panzers, the Hussar Division and the Cavalry Brigade ran head on into the main Russian force, which was twenty times larger than them.

Following the received orders the Hussar Division began its attack on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. There were three episodes, which are especially worth mentioning:

Colonel Schell and Colonel Baintner ordered their troops to advance from their positions. As the Fourth Troop of the Third Hussar Regiment approached the village of Leonowitze, they were met by men dressed in Hungarian uniforms who were signaling and urging them toward the village. They were giving the impression that it has been taken by another Hungarian unit. As the unsuspecting Hussars moved close, the unit was ambushed, suffering heavy casualties.

Another similar incident happened at the village of Kuceweschczynka where the Fourth troop of the Fourth Hussar Regiment was advancing. The Russians in the village were well hidden and silent, and they let the first reconnaissance patrols of the troop through. As the main mounted cavalry column came into the village, they were ambushed.

Panic broke out among the horses, making dismounting very difficult, and the Troop suffered heavy casualties; the troop commander was wounded and two officers were killed.

The third noteworthy episode of the day is quite different in nature. As the sixth Troop of the Fourth Hussar Regiment was moving forward, it surprised an enemy column, which was part of an entire Soviet division that was moving west toward Kleck . The Hussar troop, without realizing it, attacked a force tenfold larger, causing confusion there. The Soviet unit was routed from its original direction and suffered heavy casualties. Later the situation reversed itself when the Russian realized the modest strength of the attackers. However, the attack of the Hussar Division's tank troop saved

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the outnumbered Hussars.

In conclusion, the first day of the battle was a military success with the exception of the two episodes mentioned here. The division suffered only light casualties, reached its objectives, and stopped the Soviet offensive toward the town of Kopyl. It captured sizeable amount of enemy materiel and took numerous prisoners.

Judging from the action of the Soviet Command, they must have been surprised and puzzled by the advance of the Hussar Division, because during the course of the following day the Soviets threw into the battle 3 tank brigades and 9 infantry divisions against the Hussars.

During the night after its unsuccessful counter attack, the German Panzer Division withdrew behind Kleck, leaving the northern flank of the Hussar Division unprotected. The Fourth German Cavalry Brigade also retreated 30 km (19 miles) leaving the southern flank of the division. Both German commands “forgot” to notify the Hungarians of their withdrawal. (in general this was a frequent “shortsightedness” on the part of the Germans.) In the early morning hours, the Russians moving up on the heels of the retreating Germans took the town of Kleck. In spite of all this the Hussar Division received new orders from the German Corps headquarters to renew its attack on the following day, unaware of the fact that both of its flanks were open now. There was only one German Panzer unit left in the Timkovicze area. This unit also received orders to retreat through Kleck and join its division.

At dawn the First and Second Batteries of the First Hungarian Horse Artillery Squadron were passing through Kleck, unaware of the fact that the Russians had already taken the town. Soviet tanks surprised the cavalry column. Most of the troops and horses were overrun and trampled to death by the tanks, but two officers and twenty-two men managed to quickly dismount and turn their guns on the tanks. These artillerymen were engaged in hopeless combat, and they kept firing their guns till the last man was alive. (Later during the day when Kleck was retaken by the Hungarian troops, the corpses were found by the guns.) With their heroic action the artillerymen temporarily stopped the advance of the Soviet tanks and saved the division from total encirclement.



**Gallop horse artillery battery**

The other units of the division were locked in heavy combat with the enemy closing in on them from all sides. Due to the quick mobility of the cavalry and the mechanized units, the division was able to regroup its forces quickly from one troubled area to another and therefore survive the Soviet onslaught.

The commander of the German panzer regiment remaining in the area at first refused to cooperate with General Vattay, but when he discovered that Kleck had been taken by the Russians (through where he wanted to retreat), he changed his mind. He agreed to an assault on Kleck with the First Squadron of the Third Hussar regiment following the German tanks as “supporting infantry”. The objective was to recapture Kleck and hold it till the rest of the division could converge on the town and retreat through it, following the German units. The German tanks and the Hungarian hussars retook the town. Once they broke through the Russian line, the German tanks continued on, leaving the hussars behind to hold the town by themselves. The greatly outnumbered hussars could not hold the town for long and the enemy closed the ring around the division again.

The division had great difficulty in disengaging from the enemy to pull back. The combat was the deadliest around the bridgehead of Timkovicze where the units of the Third Hussar Regi-

ment were fighting. Slowly, by noon most of the units were able to converge to the area south of Kleck. As the Fourth Hussar Regiment was pulling back on horseback it received a Soviet tank assault on its flank, but a brilliant action by the anti-tank platoon under the command of Captain baron Stipicz repelled the tanks.<sup>29</sup>

As the troops were converging to the assembly areas, the enemy was forming for another surprise attack to the rear of the division from the northern flank. The last reserves of the division were thrown into the battle for a quick counter attack; the division's tank troop under the command of Captain Reok, and the combat engineer company led by Captain Szaller. The brave assault of these two units on a much stronger enemy force secured the northern flank again. The tank troop lost two of its tanks in the attack, and Captain Reok was seriously wounded. His life was saved but one of his arms had to be amputated later.

By late afternoon the division was able to break out, but instead of through Kleck (which would have been toward northwest) toward the south. The enemy had suffered such heavy casualties that it could not pursue the orderly withdrawing columns. The units crossed the river Szczara by late evening without any interference from the enemy. On the western bank of the river the division established connection with the neighboring German troops again.

It must be mentioned, that most of the troops fought for the past 24 hours without any sleep or food.

The German units had left the battle ground with relatively few casualties, while the Hungarian Hussar Division had borne the lion's share of the battle and had suffered very heavy casualties in both manpower and horses. The Hussar Division had been left behind by the German Corps Command to fight the much greater Soviet forces, in order to secure the withdrawal of the German troops. (This was not the first or last such case during the war.) The division with its courageous stand, had checked the forward rolling wave of the resurgent Red Army since the Battle of Kursk.

#### **4.5. The evasive defense action.**

After the battle of Timkovicze - Kleck the Hussar Division fought an evasive tactical action along the Brest (Brest Litowsk) - Warsaw east - west line against the overwhelming enemy forces.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, the division took up positions along the River Szczara according to the orders received from General Vormann, the commander of the Second German Army. The task assigned to the division was to secure the line of the Szczara and with a "limited objective" strike forward on the southern flank toward Luninec, to assist in the deployment of the soon arriving 292<sup>nd</sup> German Division under whose command the Second Hungarian Hussar Regiment had been subordinated by the German command.

On July 6<sup>th</sup> the Hussar Division Headquarters received a radio message stating that the Second Hussar Regiment the unit that had been subordinated directly to the German command had reached Borki a village approximately 20 km. (12.5 miles) from Luninec, and it was further advancing. Unfortunately, the arrival of the 292<sup>nd</sup> German Division did not occur, and at the same time, the enemy laid a heavy attack on the positions of the Third Hussar Regiment.

Finally the enemy succeeded in breaking into the positions of the Fourth Troop. A counter assault by the First and Fourth Troops, led by squadron commander Lieutenant Colonel Németh and supported by German assault guns, threw the enemy back again. In the assault Lt. Col. Németh was wounded, but he elected to remain with his men even though he was in very serious condition.

While the Third Hussar Regiment was repelling the heaviest enemy attacks for two days, the

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<sup>29</sup> Captain Stipicz was killed in action later.



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Fourth German Cavalry Brigade was forced back by the Soviet troops. The retreat of the German unit left the northern flank of the Hussar Division open again. Furthermore, the artillery ran out of ammunition, and there was a serious shortage of small arms ammunition also. Consequently, on July 6<sup>th</sup> the division was ordered to retreat and take up new position along the Mysanka creek. The supplies were slow, and the troops did not receive any rations again for four days. The withdrawal was accomplished under continuous battle contact with the enemy.

As the troops took up positions along the Mysanka on July 7<sup>th</sup> the enemy continued to exert very heavy pressure on the Third Hussar Regiment again. Unfortunately, the artillery ammunition was all gone again and the regiment had to rely on the protection of its small arms. General Vattay requested reinforcements from Corps headquarters. Two battalions of the Twelfth German Panzer Grenadier Regiment supported by assault guns and Tiger Panzers arrived under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Rohan. Although the German strike force was supposed to reinforce the Hussar Division, it remained directly subordinated to the German Corps Command. The German colonel did not give credit to the reports of the Hungarian field commanders and greatly underestimated the strength of the enemy.

Colonel Rohan, instead of forming a strong concentrated strike force, wanting to accomplish too much, he stretched his troops out along a long line. Consequently, the German counterattack failed. After the attack, most of the German troops pulled back from the lines of the Third Hussar Regiment where they stood idle till the end of the day.



Artillery crossing the river

As the German Panzer Grenadier Battalions pulled out at the end of the day, they left a gap in the line between the First and Second Squadrons of the Fourth Hussar Regiment. The enemy was quick to discover the deficiency and made an attempt to infiltrate through there. The division had to throw in its last reserves - the First Motorcyclist Company - to stop the enemy. The swift counterattack of the motorcyclists stopped the enemy but at a great price. The company suffered very heavy casualties, and all four officers of the company were killed in action.

Because there was a complete lack of artillery ammunition and because the German reinforcements left, and since the Third Hussar Regiment was outflanked again, General Vattay pulled the division back - with the consent of the German Corps Headquarters - behind the western branch of the Szczara River.

The casualties of the division were high. The records of the Second Squadron of the Fourth Hussar Regiment could serve as an example: According to the July 8<sup>th</sup> statistics, the following was the status of the Second Squadron:<sup>30</sup>

Officers and enlisted men	872	59.6%
Casualties	539	40.3%
Available horses	375	27.5-%

Note: The exceedingly high horse casualty was due to a Soviet air strike on July 7<sup>th</sup>.

According to the received orders, the division was to go into reserve status for some much needed rest. However, the orders were quickly changed, and the division was again assigned to front line duty.

To exonerate himself, for not being able to stop the overwhelming Soviet onslaught, the

<sup>30</sup> Ref: dálnoki Veress: "Magyarország honvédelme .." op.cit. Pg. 402, Vol. 2. .

German Corps commander put the blame on General Vattay and on the entire Hussar Division. To prove his point, on July 8<sup>th</sup> he issued an order in which he subordinated the Hussar Division to the 129<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division and ordered that in each regiment ten German officers would supervise the Hungarian field commanders.

At first, General Vattay was amazed then outraged; he protested to the German High Command and also to Regent Horthy. General Vattay then requested an immediate relief of duty along with the other senior officers of the division. Every man's honor was deeply hurt by the German orders since they were least expecting such a humiliation after the way the division fought. General Harteneck's orders had greatly undermined the morale of the troops and destroyed the trust in the integrity of the German commanders. The German Corps commander eventually retracted his orders, but the irreparable damage had already been done.

#### 4.6. The Jörgen “supervision”.

The Russian breakthrough at Bobruisk necessitated the reorganization of the troops of “Heeresgruppe Mitte” (Central Army Group). A new army had been quickly organized under the command of General Roman. The following units were assigned to this new army command: The XIII. German-Corps, the 129<sup>th</sup> German Division, The Hungarian Hussar Division, an “SS” combat team called the “Jörgen Group” after its commanding officer, and the supposedly shortly arriving 292<sup>nd</sup> German Division. While awaiting the arrival of all the troops, the available units had to fall back in a defensive delay action behind the Grywda creek and form a line of defense there.

In the meantime the Soviet troops infiltrated the German lines, causing disorder there. Consequently the “Jörgen Group” quickly retreated without notifying the neighboring Hussar Division.

(Not an unusual “omission” from the German commands!)

As a result of the quick German withdrawal, the Soviet troops surrounded the entire Hungarian field artillery of the division, which had been concentrated in a relatively small area. The artillery units had to break out of the encirclement by costly and bloody close combat in which they lost two of their 100 mm Howitzers. Among the many casualties were Major Dannay the C.O. of the Second Horse Artillery Squadron and Captain Réthy battery commander.



**Col. Zoltán Schell, commander of the 2nd Hussar Regiment**

Although Gen. Harteneck had been prevented from going through with his humiliating plans, as a result of the clash between Gen. Vattay and Gen. Harteneck, the German army command had ordered that the Hussar Division be placed under the “*personal advice and supervision of SS Leader Jörgen*”. Jörgen had an SS rank equivalent to general major while General Vattay's rank was lieutenant field marshal that was a general rank higher than Jörgen's. This other unfortunate German order insulted everyone again and certainly did not help the ally relationship between the Hungarian and German troops. To ease the situation General Vattay temporarily refrained from the tactical leadership of the division and turned it over to Colonel Schell, whom then he placed under the “tactical supervision” of SS leader Jörgen.

On July 11<sup>th</sup> the units of the Hussar Division took up positions along the Grywda Creek. South of the division the “Jörgen Group” and North of the division the 129<sup>th</sup> German Division moved up to the line.



**Hussars in battle – a contemporary painting**

ly beat the Russian out of the village and the original line of defense was reestablished.

The Soviet troops renewed their attack with strong tank support all along the line. The Russians had quickly discovered the gap and they were pouring through it, outflanking the division again. In order to avoid total disaster, Colonel Schell ordered the troops gradually to pull back. Even these orders were almost too late. The Second Squadron of the Fourth Hussars had gotten in a very critical situation. They were caught in the enemy crossfire and suffered 200 casualties before they could break out from the encirclement.

When Jörgen found out about the withdrawal, he became furious and reordered the Hussar Division to its original position. Coronet Schell openly refused his order. At the critical moment, Lieutenant Colonel István Szabadhegyi the commanding officer of the Second Squadron of the Fourth Hussar Regiment, arrived at the command post to report to Colonel Schell. Jörgen repeated his orders to him in an insulting manner. Lieutenant Colonel Szabadhegyi challenged Jörgen to go back to the front line with him to see the situation for himself. Jörgen then conceded and issued his orders for withdrawal.

The “Jörgen supervision” ended with this episode and henceforth the division was directly subordinated to the XXIII German Corps Command.

#### **4.7. Under the command of the XXIII. German Corps.**



**Advancing Hussar platoon**

During the day the enemy cautiously moved up all along the line and prepared for a new offensive. After darkness the Third Hussar Regiment received orders to fall back to a more advantageous defensive position. When Col. Shell learned about the withdrawal the next morning, he ordered the original positions to be retaken. The Fourth Hussar Regiment spearheaded the advance. The village of Owsta was retaken by ferocious bayonet assault by the First Squadron of the Fourth Hussars. In a hand to hand combat the Hussars literal-

The entire front sector was slowly pulling back behind the Jasiolda River by July 12<sup>th</sup>. On the northern flank of the division the Fifteenth Cyclist Battalion was fighting a rearguard action under the command of Lieutenant colonel Bresztovszky. As they were moving back, they were ambushed in a thick-forested area by a strong partisan force equipped with mortars and some artillery. By the time they fought their way through the partisans the retreating German units had blown up all the bridges ahead of them across the Jasiolda River.

Consequently, Colonel Bresztovszky had to make a stand on the eastern bank of the river against the pursuing T-34 Soviet tanks. In a close range duel with the tanks, the mechanized artillery battery supporting the battalion destroyed quite a

few of the Russian tanks, but in the fight they lost three of their four 105 mm. Howitzers. The entire force suffered very large bloody casualties. In the meantime, the division's combat engineers rushed to the scene and under constant and heavy enemy fire, were able to repair the bridge so that most of the troops could cross the Jasiolda. However, a great portion of the vehicles and heavy equipment was lost.

The new German army commander, General of the Artillery Freiherr von Roman had a surprisingly different attitude than the previous German commanders. While his assignments were just as demanding or perhaps more so than the previous ones, he gave a free hand to the Hungarian commanders to accomplish them. He stated that he had trust and confidence in the Hungarian Hussars who had shown that they did not know the impossible. Through General Roman, mutual trust and respect was restored between the Hungarian troops and the German commands.

The first assignment given to the division was to throw back the Russian troops at the town of Sielec<sup>31</sup> who had crossed the Jasiolda River. Before the division could deploy its units, new orders came from Corps headquarters. According to the received information mechanized and armored enemy units were advancing in the vicinity of the town of Pruzana, (also on the western bank of the Jasiolda River) with the intention of cutting off the German units fighting around the city of Kobrin (northeast of Pruzana), and push them into the Pripyat Marshes. The division's task was to stop the advancing enemy and to secure the withdrawal of the trapped German forces.



**Hussars ready for battle**

Kobrin area were pouring through on all of the roads behind the line of the defense. The Hussar Division had accomplished its mission.

At three o'clock in the morning, the division received orders to retreat and follow the route of the German troops. The disengagement was accomplished without any notable action by the enemy. By late that morning, the units of the division crossed the new line of defense established by the German troops.

A few days later, during the last days of the month, units of the division, which had been earlier detached to various German commands - the Second Hussar Regiment and the Third Mechanized Artillery Battalion - were assigned to reinforce the XX. German Corps on June 29<sup>th</sup>. At the time it was a rather unfortunate decision as far the division was concerned; since approximately one third of the division was taken away when it was called upon to accomplish the most difficult tasks. During that time period the Second Hussar Regiment and the Third Artillery did not suffer as heavy casualties as the main body of the division did. Nevertheless they had gotten into demanding combat also.

A reconnaissance confirmed the presence of strong enemy forces in the vicinity of Mielniki and Borowiki. The Fifteenth Cyclist Battalion was ordered to counterattack. The battalion, attacking with fixed bayonets and hand grenades, pushed the Russian troops back in spite of the heavy enemy fire. The Soviet troops finally called in tanks to stop the Hungarian advance and took up a bridgehead position in the vicinity of Borowiki.

By 10 o'clock that evening the Russian assault had grounded to a halt all along the line. In spite of their overpowering might, the Soviet advance was slow and did not gain much ground, while the German troops retreating from the

<sup>31</sup> Sielec or Siedlce

As a rearguard unit of the XX German Corps from July 15<sup>th</sup> to July 18<sup>th</sup>, they especially distinguished themselves. According to the report of the chief of operations of the XX German Corps, the Second Hussar Regiment fought with extraordinary valor. When the regiment's ammunition ran out, it continued the fight and conducted several counterattacks with fixed bayonets.

#### 4.8. In the battle of Warsaw.

After the battle of Pruzana, General Vattay requested a rest for his battle weary troops. In response to the request German army commander issued an order according to which- a joint Hungarian-German committee was to review the status of the division. According to the committee's report the casualties of the division were heavy. In the time period of fifteen days from July 1 to July 15 casualties consisted of 69 officers and 3000 enlisted men.

(Considering a ratio of 50 to 1 of enlisted men to officers in the front line troops, the officers Casualties were approximately in the same proportion. ) According to the statistical data compiled byre German liaison officer; the following units suffered the highest casualties: <sup>32</sup>

Second-Squadron, Third- Hussar Regiment	41 <sup>0</sup> %
Fifteenth Cyclist Battalion	38%
First Squadron, Third Hussar Regiment	37%
Tank Squadron	35%
First Squadron, Fourth Hussar Regiment	33%

(The report lists all of the units of the division. These were the units with the highest casualties. Author's notes). Since the time the division left Hungary on June 11<sup>th</sup> the total casualty of the division was approximately 50%.

On-the recommendation of the committee the division was pulled out on August 3<sup>rd</sup> for a much needed rest. During the period some of the lost equipment was replenished and new antitank weapons (bazookas) were supplied- to the division. The artillery firepower regained its strength from the remaining 12 artillery pieces, to a total of 48.

New personnel replacements arrived and while the division did not regain its original Man-power strength, the spirit and the morale of the troops was reborn, like the mythical "Phoenix".

General Vattay was recalled to Hungary and reassigned to take command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Reserve Corps for a short while after which he was appointed to head up the Military Chancellery of Regent Horthy. The division command was taken over temporarily by Colonel Schell till General Major Ibrányi arrived from Hungary and took command.

After fifteen days of rest, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August the division was subordinated to the VII German Corps. The Corps commander's intention was to deploy the division against the Polish uprising, but the division commander explained to the German command that there are long historical ties between the Hungarian and the Polish nations and the Hungarian Hussars would not turn their guns on the Polish people. Perhaps as a form of reprisal by the German command, the division was reassigned to the V German "SS" Panzer Corps commanded by Obergruppenführer (Major-General) Gille. The Third Panzer Division, the 5<sup>th</sup> "SS" Panzer Division and the Hungarian Hussar Division formed the Corps. The division was sent to the front sector where one of the most bitter and aggressive battles of the Second World War was being fought. This battle is known as the Battle of Warsaw.

The units of the division moved up to the front line on August 21<sup>st</sup>. Day after day the division repelled the strongest Soviet attacks. With their new weapons the Hussars once again became the masters of the battlefield. The Hussar Division stood fast like Rock of Gibraltar.

On August 30<sup>th</sup> the German command in a separate news release gave account the "heroic

<sup>32</sup> Ref : dálnoki Veress: *"Magyarország honvédelme .."* op.cit. Vol. II, pg: 441

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struggle” of the Hungarian Hussars and Generaloberst Guderian, the Chief of the German General Staff expressed his highest appreciation to the General Ibrányi. The German High Command (the OKH) very seldom gave such acknowledgements to its own troops and never during the course of the war to any of its ally troops.

With the Romanian defection- on-August 23<sup>rd</sup> the situation became critical concerning Hungary. Consequently the division was pulled out gradually between September 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. It was transported back to Hungary to defend its own homeland. Most of the units arrived in Hungary in early October to the vicinity of the town of Kecskemét, in central Hungary. Due to the emergency nature of the situation, the units were thrown in to battle as soon as they arrived without waiting for the rest of the units of the division. The various units of the division fought in the defense of the Tisza River, on Csepel Island, in the defense of Budapest and West of Budapest in the Vértes Mountain. Henceforth the Hussars shared in the fate of the rest of the Hungarian Army.



**Hussar charge!**



## **5. ABOVE THE CLOUDS FLIES THE EAGLE.**

(The marching song of the Royal Hungarian Air Force.)

The brief story of the Royal Hungarian Air Force.

The origin of the Royal Hungarian Air Force was rooted in the old Austro-Hungarian “Imperial and Royal” (K.u.K.) Air Force around the turn of the century.

By the time of World War I the “Imperial and Royal” Air Force had 70 planes, which increased to several thousands, by the end of the war. The commanding officer of the first unit of the Austro-Hungarian Air Force was the Hungarian born Capt. István Petrőczy. Among the innovators of the Air Force was also a young Hungarian first lieutenant by the name of Tódor (Theodore) von Kármán who throughout his lifetime became one of the foremost scientists of the century. In his later years he served as the director of the prestigious Guggenheim Aeronautics Laboratory of “Cal-Tech”. His theories have been applied with great success in the fields of Aerodynamics, jet engineering, supersonics and thermodynamics.

During World War I there were numerous Hungarian fliers serving with distinction in the Austro-Hungarian Air Force. Heading up the list was Lt. József Kiss with 19 air victories. In addition, special mention must be given to Sgt. Frigyes Hefty who had been awarded the Golden Medal of Valor three times.

After World War I, according to the Peace Edict of Trianon, Hungary was deprived of its Air Force and in 1920 the last remaining military airplanes in Hungary were confiscated by the Entente Forces.

With the disestablishment of the Hungarian Air Force however, Hungarian aviation did not cease to exist, since many of the pilots turned to sport aviation, in government sponsored flying clubs. One of the most spectacular feats was accomplished by pilot Lt. Endres and navigator Magyar in their transatlantic flight from Grace Harbour Newfoundland to Bicske Hungary in 1931, with their Lockheed “SIRIUS” plane. This was one of the early successful transatlantic flights after Lindbergh's maiden flight in 1927.

In 1935, the Royal Hungarian Air Force (R.H.A.F.) was reequipped, purchasing most of her aircraft from Italy. In less than six years, there was a small but capable and very spirited Air Force in existence again. In 1941 the R.H.A.F. consisted of two fighter wings each of four squadrons, two bomber wings, a tactical reconnaissance wing of 12 squadrons and a strategic reconnaissance group of two squadrons. Each squadron consisted of 12 aircrafts. Most of the fighters were Italian made, Fiat CR-42 and Fiat RE-2000 Hawks (*Héja*), and most of the bombers were also Italian made Caproni 135s and some German made Ju-86s. The reconnaissance planes were of older vintages: Falcon WM-21s (*Sólyom*) and the German-made Heinkel HE-70s. In addition, for training purposes there were 162 Fiat CR-32 fighters, 70 various types of older bombers and 136 reconnaissance planes, which were considered obsolete for combat duty.

In June 1941, an Air Force Group was organized under the command of Lt. Col. Orosz to provide ground support to the Mobile Corps. The unit consisted of two fighter squadrons, one bomber squadron, and 2 reconnaissance squadrons. During the first few months of the war, the fighters shot down 17 enemy planes at the loss of two fighters and one Ju-86 bomber. One of the most significant actions of the bombers was on Aug 11, when four Caproni Ca-135s destroyed the important bridge over the river Bug near Nikolayev, eliminating the retreat route of the trapped Soviet troops in the area, thus providing the opportunity to take a large number of Soviet prisoners at Nikolayev. The Air Force Group returned to Hungary in the late fall of 1941 when the other units of the Mobile Corps have been pulled out.

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In the summer of 1942 when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army was sent to the Russian Front to join the Axis powers, an Air Force Group was organized again for combat duty to accompany the ground troops. The group was commanded by Lt. Col. Németh and later by Lt. Col. András. It consisted of a fighter group, a bomber group and a reconnaissance squadron. In particular, the fighters excelled again, since during a few months time they scored a spectacular 24 kills with their Fiat RE-2000s at the loss of one of their own planes. Another loss was the accidental crash and death of First Lt. István Horthy, the son of Regent



1st Lt. István Horthy in his ill fated „Héja”



1st Lt. István Horthy

Horthy who was serving with the fighter group, flying the ill fated *Héja* fighters. In the meanwhile, the bombers flew 79 missions, at the loss of one aircraft in which group C.O. Maj. Mocsáry was killed, but they also shot down one enemy plane.

With the passing of time however, casualties began to mount and by mid of January the flyable aircraft had dropped to 50% of the original number, while the Soviet air activity was continuously increasing.

On January 12<sup>th</sup> the Soviet forces of the “Voronezh Front” mounted a successful offensive and broke through the Hungarian defenses at Uryw. (See “The Attack at Uryw” Chapter 9. ) With their armored spearheads, they quickly advanced and surrounded the Hungarian airfield at Iłowskoje. Approximately 600 airmen, under the command of Lt. Col. Csukás and later Capt. Heppes held off the Reds for five days, suffering a great number of casualties, including Lt. Col. Csukás, who was killed in action. (See “Islands of Defense” Chapter 10) When the evacuation orders came, only four engines would start in the 40 degree below weather, so all the remaining fighters had to be destroyed. Then the airmen broke out of the encirclement taking all of the injured and wounded with them.

The Air Brigade on the Eastern Front spent the next few months training with new German aircraft. The fighters were reequipped with Messerschmitt Me-109s, the bombers and the long range reconnaissance squadron with Ju-88's. A new “Stuka” Ju-87 dive bomber squadron had been organized also. From May to November 1943 the fighters flew a total of 1560 missions and shot down 70 enemy aircraft at a loss of 9 of their own pilots. In the meanwhile the Ju-88's flew some 1000 sorties and the Ju-87s some 1500 missions.<sup>33</sup>

In the early summer of 1944 total war had come to Hungary, when the sky above became the battleground and the Hungarian cities and countryside the targets. The U.S. 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force commanded by Gen. Eaker and established in the Foggia area in southeast Italy - in the wake of the Allied ground advances - begun its bombing offensive against Hungary bringing destruction, suffering and death to the people. Up to this time, the Allies spared Hungary of any aerial attacks, since no state of war existed between them and Hungary. However, after the German takeover on March 17, 1944 the gloves came off and Hungarian cities became the subject of bombing raids similar to those in Germany. The civilian population was completely caught off guard, and suffered greatly. By this time the Allies were employing their “carpet-bombing” technique, as already mentioned in an earlier chapter, which emphasized the saturated bombing of areas rather than aiming for specific targets. Consequently many residential areas, hospitals, schools and churches were indiscriminately destroyed. The main and most frequented target was Budapest, but eventually every Hungarian major

<sup>33</sup> Ref: dálnoki Veress: „Magyarország Honvédelme” Op.Cit. Vol. II. pp 240-242.

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city of any military, industrial or transportation significance had been hit by the Allied bombers. This is a partial list: Székesfehérvár, Győr, Diósgyőr, Nagyváradi, Hatvan, Szombathely, Sopron, Debrecen, Pécs, Szeged, Miskolc, Ózd and most of all the oil refineries around Nagykanizsa and Láspe.

In the face of the Allied bombing offensive, the defense of the Hungarian homeland became of prime importance. The R.H.A.F. had organized an interceptor unit, the “101<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group” commonly known as the “Pumas” after their emblem depicting a read puma head at the Veszprém airfield. The unit was commanded by Lt. Col. Aladár Heppes, and included three squadrons of-



Lt. Col Heppes with his Me-109

Hungarian built Messerschmitt Me-109Gs, a total of 40 fighters. Fighting the awesome power of U.S. 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, however was an agonizing experience for the 40 Pumas, as the sky was literally darkened by hundreds and hundreds of these “Angels of death”, as Lt. Col. Heppes led his gladiators again and again in a game of death.

The Pumas had their first encounter with U.S. 15<sup>th</sup> on May 24<sup>th</sup> '44 when, with ever increasing frequency fought their battles with the mighty Allied air fleet. On June 16<sup>th</sup>, 28 Pumas intercepted a formation of 500 B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators, escorted by a number of P-51

Mustangs, P-47 Thunderbolts, and Lightnings. The Pumas claimed 10 Liberators, 4 Lightnings, a Mustang and, a Thunderbolt, at a loss of 13 Me-109s.<sup>34</sup>

On June 26<sup>th</sup>, 30 Hungarian Messerschmitts intercepted a formation of 90 Liberators escorted by 50 Mustangs and Lightnings. On that day the Hungarians scored 3 Liberators and 2 Mustangs at a loss of 3 Me-109s.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup> 42 Pumas intercepted 712 Flying Fortresses. and Liberators accompanied by 180 Mustangs, and Lightnings heading for Budapest. The Hungarian fighters scored 11 raiders with no loss to themselves. Later, Luftwaffe fighters of Wiener-Neustadt, Austria had joined the fight also.

The scare of death on the once peaceful Hungarian sky varied almost day by day, as the raids continued. Due to the ever increasing Allied bombing offensive in September, the “Puma” Fighter Group was enlarged to a six squadron fighter wing, and in January '45, to a nine squadron wing totaling approximately 100 Me-109s. In the meanwhile, with the approach of Soviet troops, the 5<sup>th</sup> Soviet Air Army attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front and the 17<sup>th</sup> Soviet Air Army supporting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front begun their raids also. September 19<sup>th</sup> marked the date of their air offensive against Hungary, when Soviet planes bombed the city of Szolnok.

The story of the air defense of Hungary would not be complete without giving credit to the defending anti aircraft batteries as well. There is only sketchy data available of their performance, but according to the available records till the end of September 1944, they shot down over 100 hostile aircraft over Hungary.<sup>35</sup>

Due to the Russian advance into central Hungary toward Budapest, the R.H.A.F. had to turn all of its attention to the Russian Front leaving the defense of the homeland to antiaircraft artillery. As of September 25<sup>th</sup>, all available units including the “Pumas” had been reassigned to support the battle weary ground troops, and fight the old foe, the Soviet Air force again.

During the siege of Budapest the R.H.A.F.'s transportation squadron with their JU-52-s flew daily missions from the airfield of Pápa over the surrounded city, dropping badly needed supplies to the defenders.

<sup>34</sup> Air Progress, June 1967

<sup>35</sup> Csanádi, Nagyváradi, Winkler: “A Magyar Repülés Története”. Műszaki Könyvkiadó Budapest. Pg. 255.

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In the wake of the steady Soviet advance into Hungary however, the R.H.A.F.'s operating bases were pushed out of the country into Austria and Bavaria. The “Puma” Fighter Wing to Raffelding (west of Linz), the training and support units to Klagenfurt, Austria, and the Air Brigade Headquarters, commanded by Brig. Gen. Szirmay, to Pocking, Germany.

From their new bases, the “Pumas” commanded by Lt. Col. Heppes and the 101/1 Fighter Bomber Group commanded by: Capt. Lévy continued to fly their agonizing combat missions, against the ever increasing odds.

The end came to these champions of a lost cause, at the airfields of Markersdorf, and Raffelding in April 1945.

The statistics shows that the R.H.A.F.'s most distinguished unit, the “Puma” Fighter Group/Wing ran up the following tally: <sup>36</sup>

- 1943 in the Soviet Union, 70 Soviet aircraft
- 1944 over Hungary 110 Allied bombers (Liberators and Flying Fortresses), 56 fighters (Mustangs, Thunderbolts, Lightnings)
- 1944-45 over Hungary: 218 Soviet aircraft.

Grand total of 454 air victories, with the following top aces with over 20 kills:

Ens. Dezső v. Szentgyörgyi 30 air victories (Imprisoned by the Communists in Hungary for six years, killed in an accident in 1971.)

Capt. György v. Debrődy 26 air victories. (emigrated to the US after the war, passed away in 1984)

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. László v. Molnár, 25 air victories (Killed in action near Káld in 1944 )

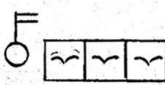
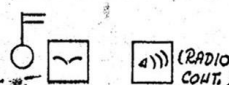
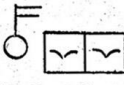
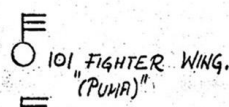
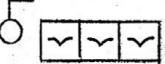
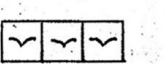
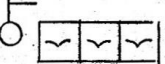

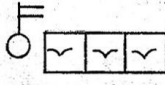
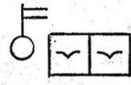


2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Lajos Tóth, 26 air victories. (Executed by the Communists in Hungary in 1951.)



1st Lt. István Horthy at pre-flight briefing

<sup>36</sup>Csaba Stenge: „Elfejtett hősök. A Magyar Királyi Honvéd Légierők ászai a második világháborúban”, Budapest 2016


## PART II. THE WAR OUTSIDE OF HUNGARY

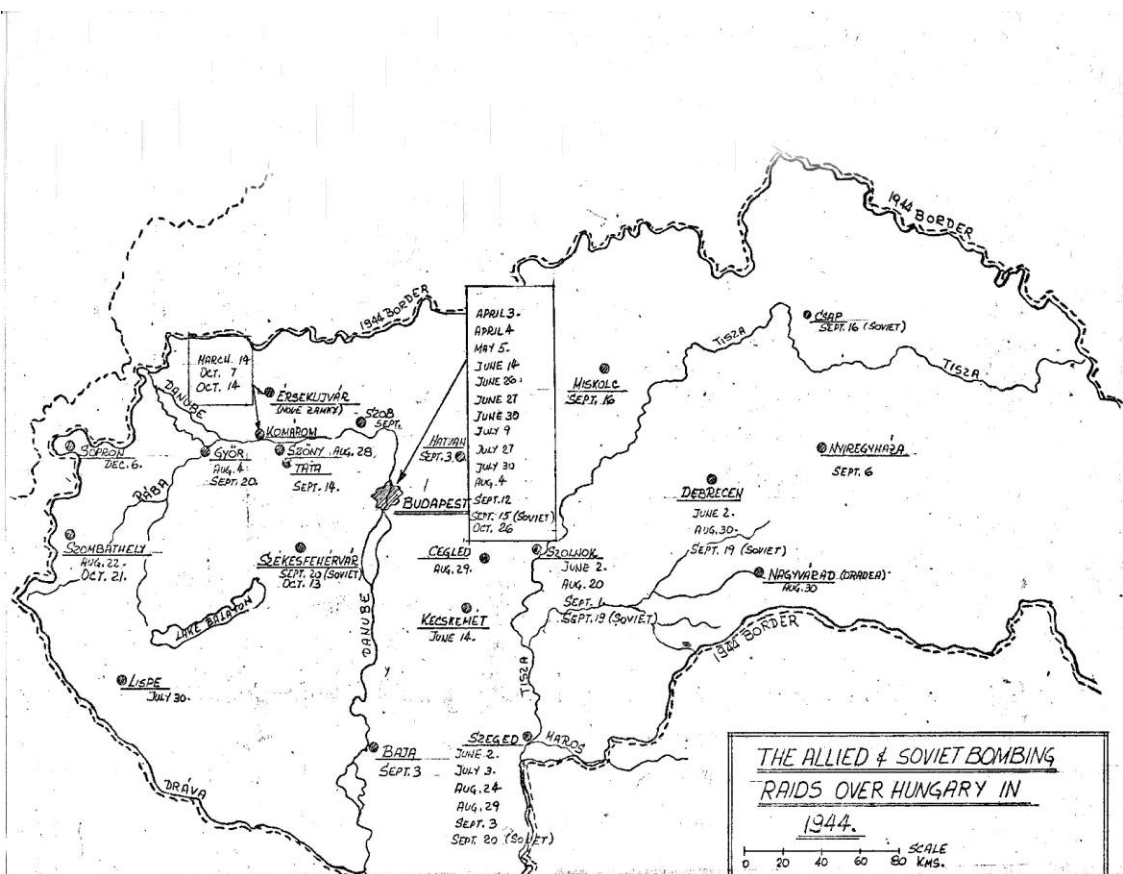
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BOMBER	  102. FAST BOMBER GR.    102. DIVE BOMBER GR.	
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THE COMBAT STRENGTH

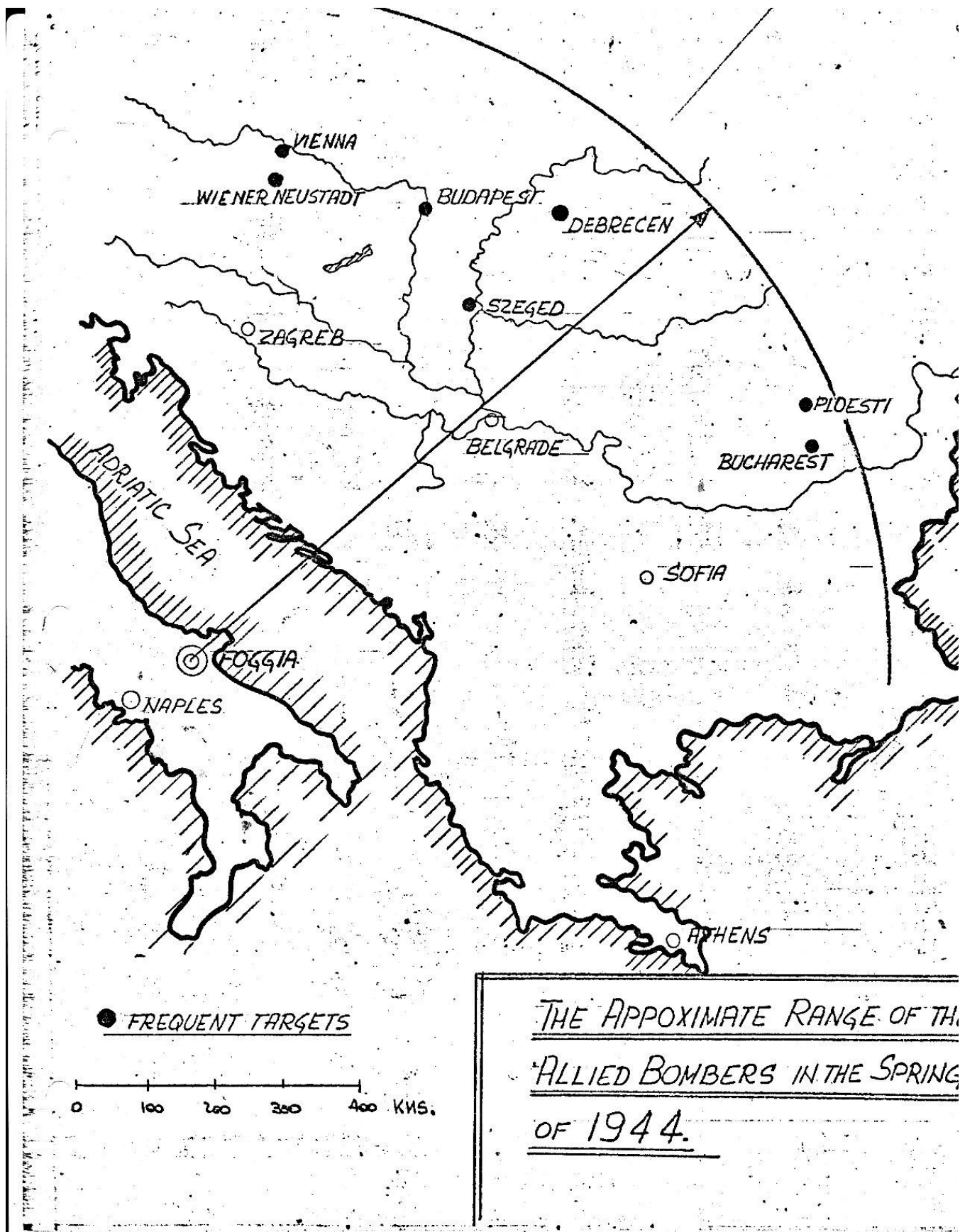
OF THE

ROYAL HUNGARIAN AIR FORCE

 : SQUADRON  
APPROX. 12-16 AIRCRAFT.



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## PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL



### 1. THE DEFENSE OF THE CARPATHIANS.

The story of the First Hungarian Army defending the historical frontiers of Hungary.

- 1.1. The Order of Battle of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army.
- 1.2. The Advance of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army.
- 1.3. The Partisan Activity.
- 1.4. The Soviet “Pocket” at Horod.
- 1.5. The Summer Soviet Offensive.

#### **1.1. The mobilization and order of battle of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army.**

After the disastrous-winter battle-of Stalingrad the initiative moved to the Soviet forces on the Eastern Front. The Russian forces were moving steadily ahead, approaching the borders-of Hungary. The “Axis” counteroffensives could score only temporary victories, and at best it could only slow down the Soviet onslaught. In a secret memorandum to the Hungarian government, the chief of the Hungarian General Staff, General Szombathelyi voiced his opinion that the “Axis” forces could no longer deliver a decisive blow to the enemy, especially considering the possibility of a new front on the West, therefore the only purpose of any military action was to find suitable peace conditions.” Unfortunately for land locked Hungary, surrounded by Germany and other Axis allies there was no practical opportunity to accomplish any such thing, unless there would be an Allied Balkan invasion.



**Minister President  
Miklós Kállay**

Some intelligence information indicated that the Western Allies were considering such a Balkan invasion. Minister president Kállay's cabinet was hoping that the Soviet advance could be stopped at the Carpathians so that Hungary would come under Western occupation by-the allied forces approaching from the Balkan, instead of being the victim of the Soviet onrush. Having had a taste of Communism in 1919, most of all,

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

the government wanted-to save Hungary from a “Communist takeover”.

Regent Horthy had sent General Szombathelyi to the High Command of the German Armed Forces; Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the “OKH” to discuss the future military intentions of the Third Reich. General Szombathelyi paid his visit to the OKH in the latter part of December 1943. Upon his return on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, he ordered the mobilization of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army for the defense of the north-eastern Carpathians . For the time being, the mobilized units were:

- 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, command post at Szolnok
- 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, command post at Ungvár
- 1<sup>st</sup> Mountaineer Brigade, command post at Beszterce
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Mountaineer Brigade, command post at Munkács
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Armor Division, command post at Kecskemét.

The designated line of defense was the northeastern Carpathians from the “Tatár Pass” to the “Uzsok Pass” including both passes.

It is interesting to note that all of the mobilized units were from central and northeast Hungary while other combat ready units within the country remained at their peacetime locations:

- 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Szabadka
- 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Nagyvárad
- 27<sup>th</sup> (Székely) Light Infantry Division at Marosvásárhely.

All of these units were along the Hungarian Romanian border while units remaining in western Hungary, “Transdanubia”, were left in their peacetime status. (For the most part only the Cadre was on active duty.)

This mobilization plan bore out the intention of the Kállay cabinet again: protecting Hungary from the east, but leaving the forces of western Hungary intact as much as possible for the support of a possible western- invasion. Of course, all these hopeful plans were negated by the German occupation of Hungary of March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1944. (Described in an earlier chapter of this book) and by the Allied landing in Italy rather than in the Balkans.

Soon after the surprise German occupation of Hungary, which temporarily interrupted the mobilization, and transportation of the First-Army to the northeastern Carpathians, the German military leadership came up with new demands.



**The defenders of the Carpathians. Gen. Csatay followed by Gen. Kisbarnaki Farkas, on an inspection tour**

The quick Russian forward thrust had broken the German line between the 1<sup>st</sup> German Panzer Army and the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army, leaving a 100 km (62 miles) gap between the two armies in front of the Carpathians. In that huge gap the only force opposing the Red Army was the VII. Hungarian Corps (command post at Stanislaw) with 3 occupational divisions, the 201<sup>st</sup> at Usciesko the 19<sup>th</sup> at Nieszwiska, and the 18<sup>th</sup> at Nizniuw fighting advancing Russian tank units. These divisions were equipped for occupational duty only hence they did not have adequate heavy weapons, antitank

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guars and artillery and this situation lead to exceedingly high casualties. They were slowly falling back toward the Carpathians. The German-High-Command wanted-the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army to thrust forward from the Carpathians in order to reestablish the connection between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> German Armies. For that purpose they insisted on assigning 3 more divisions to the 1<sup>st</sup> Army the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division-(Eger), the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Nagyvárad), and the 27<sup>th</sup> (Székely) Light Infantry Division (Marosvásárhely). As stated before, the 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Divisions were located along the Romanian border, and the special request for these divisions, no doubt, was done under Romanian influence. Hitler's most favored and trusted ally, Romania, has felt uneasy for quite some time about the presence of these combat ready divisions located near its borders. This was an opportune time for Hitler to do a favor for Romanian dictator, General Antonescu by removing these units from their locations.



**Hungarian heavy artillery 30.5cm. mortar. Wt: 22 metric tons, projectile: 287 kg.**

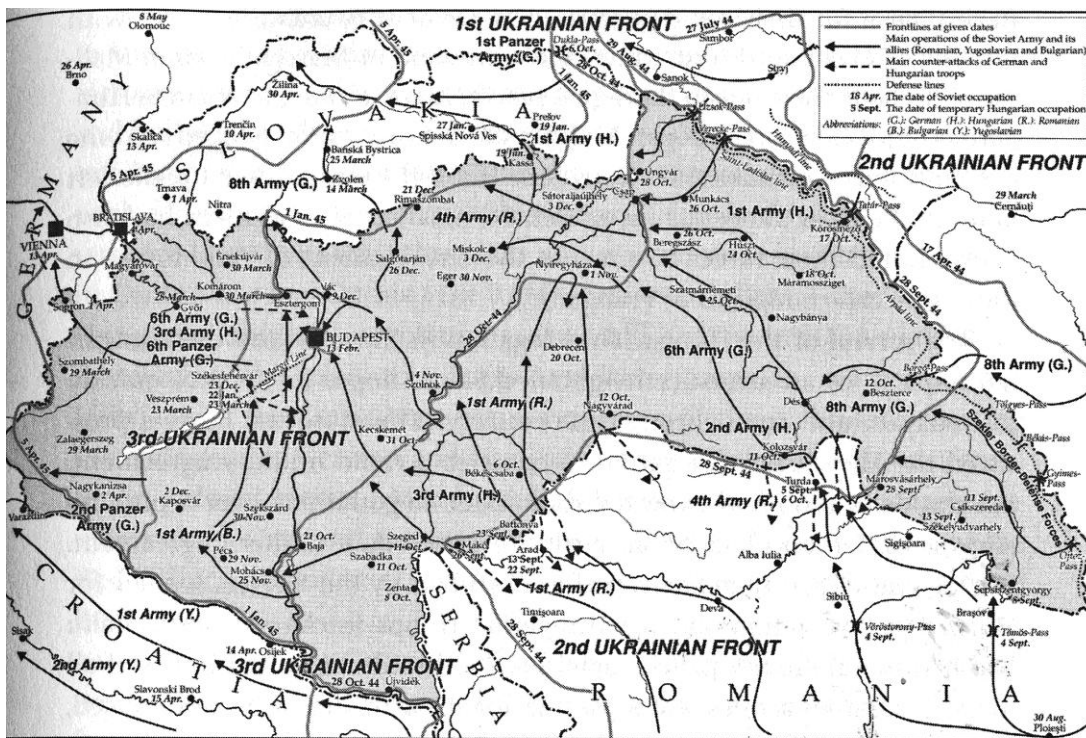
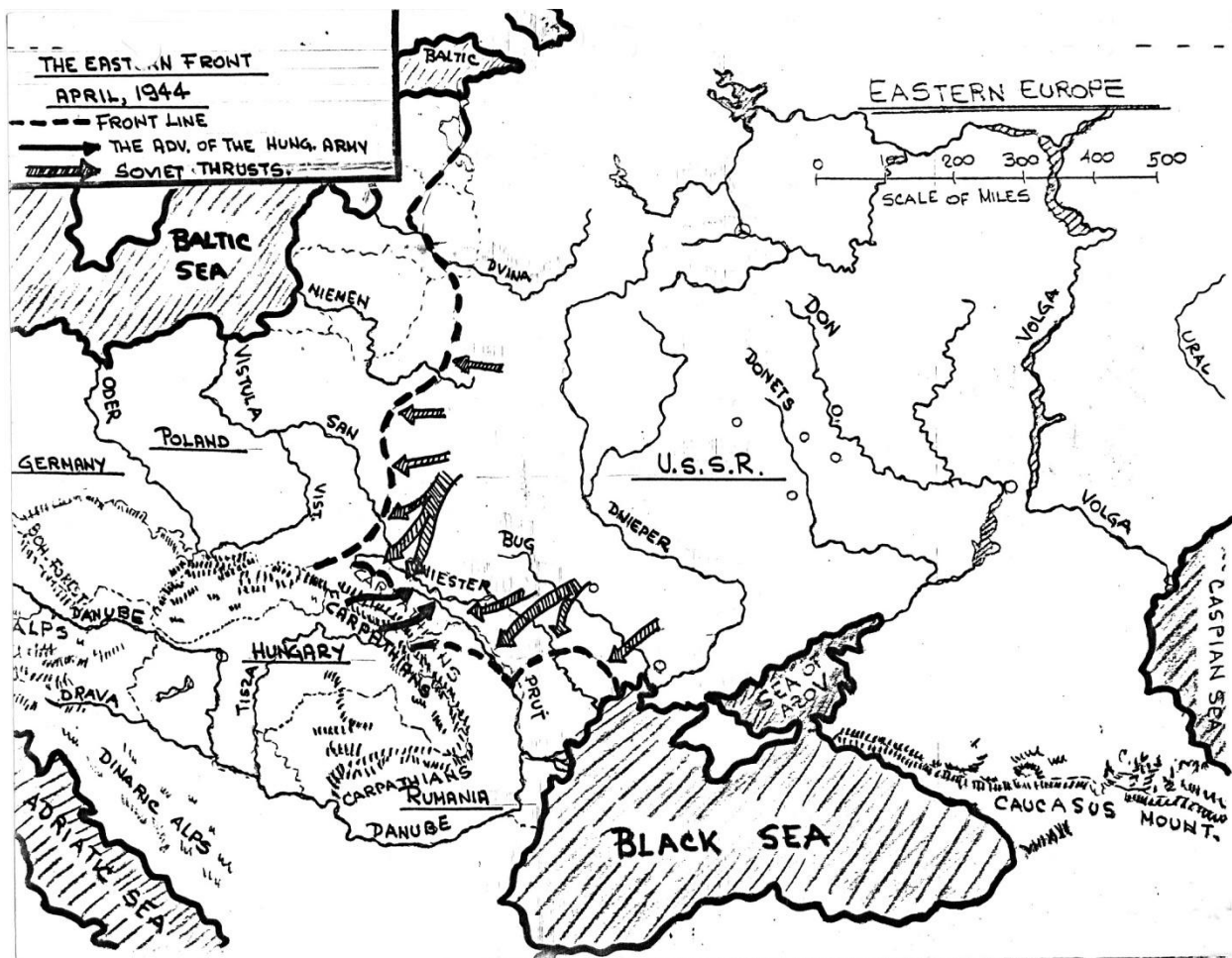


**75mm antitank gun in the Carpathians**



**An AAA gun crew**

## PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL



Map 4. Military operations in the Carpathian Basin, 1944–1945.

## 1.2. The advance of the First Hungarian Army.

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1944 Lieutenant Field Marshall Géza Lakatos, the commander of the Hungarian occupational forces in front of the Carpathians and Lieutenant Field Marshal István Náday, the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army visited Generalfeldmarschall Otto Model, the commander of the "Army Group North Ukraine", to discuss the final plans for the deployment of the 1<sup>st</sup> First Hungarian Army. The Army was supposed to be adjacent to "Army Group North Ukraine".

The 1<sup>st</sup> Army began to assemble in the northeast Carpathians in March 1944. Due to the deteriorating situation, however, some of the units had to leave for the battle zone sooner than anticipated. The advance of the first unit was not strategically part of the operation of the army, but it was so unusual and bold in terms of standard military tactics that it is especially noteworthy. The VII Corps command requested artillery support for the battered occupational infantry units fighting in the vicinity of the city of Stanislaw from the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which was still assembling in the Carpathians.



The „Turán” Hungarian medium tank

The 16<sup>th</sup> Division commander ordered the 76<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Squadron (with horse teams) commanded by Lt. Col. Phillipovics (the commanding officer's identity is not certain; author's note) to go to Stanislaw. This artillery unit without any other support advanced approx. 100 km. (62 miles) with great boldness, and lost only 1 of its 10.5 cm field howitzers in a close encounter with Soviet T-34 tanks. It reached Stanislaw where it very effectively supported the battle weary 18<sup>th</sup> Occupational Division,

The 1<sup>st</sup> Army began its offensive on April 17<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM in a northeasterly direction. The VII Corps, already in the vicinity of Stanislaw, formed the northern or left flank of the army. It was rather dif-

ficult to move across the terrain. The Carpathians were still snow covered and icy, and on the other side, a sea of mud was awaiting the troops on the unpaved roads.

On the second-day of the offensive; the 27<sup>th</sup> Division reached the village of Zabie (Zhabe), the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mountaineer Brigade took Detatyn (Delyatyatin), and-the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armor Division was advancing toward Kolomea (Kolomyva) The first encounter of the Armor Division with the Soviet tanks was at Nadvornaya. The Armor Division was equipped with newly built Hungarian "Turán" tanks which had not yet been battle tested. In this armor class, the Turán proved to be a very worthy opponent of the dreaded Russian T-34 on a one to one basis. However, the Hungarian Army never could match the endless number of Soviet T-34 tanks. While the Russian war industry was turning out 1000-crew tanks-a week, the Hungarian *total was for entire war 215 Turán I and 55 Turán II* <sup>37</sup>. The Turán II was an updated version of the Turán I The encounter was swift. The result; four T-34s destroyed and the victors were the Turáns with only 2 tanks lost.

<sup>37</sup>Ref: Niehorster: "The Royal Hungarian Army 1920-1945" Axis Europa Books. Pg. 43.

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**Tank borne Hungarian infantry moving up to the front line**

Simultaneously with the 1<sup>st</sup> Army's advance, the XLVI. German Panzer Corps opened an attack adjacent to the northern flank of the army. The German units took Olessa and also started advancing.

On April 20<sup>th</sup> the advancing 16<sup>th</sup> Division encircled a larger Soviet force in the vicinity of Otynya. After a daylong battle, the division took approximately 500 prisoners, 30 vehicles, mortars, and artillery pieces. This victory greatly increased the morale of the troops.

The army's forward thrust continued On- April 22<sup>nd</sup> the 16<sup>th</sup> Division engaged in heavy combat, probably with the units of the 27<sup>th</sup> Soviet Tank Brigade (or Division) and by the end of the day it had knocked out 17 of the T-34 Soviet tanks and had taken the villages of Chiebichin and Lesni. On the same day, the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountaineer Brigade also distinguished itself by taking the airfield south of Kolomea (Kolomyva). On the following day the same unit crossed the River Prut with great boldness and in a surprise attack took a number of Russian prisoners including a high-ranking Soviet officer. Other

members of the 18<sup>th</sup> Russian army command. After darkness, however the brigade was ordered back to the southern bank of the river, where it took up defensive positions.

On the southern flank of the army, the 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the newly arrived 27<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Division took the towns of Yablonov and Kosov on April 27<sup>th</sup>.

In-the early part of May, the offensive of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army was concluded. Although the forward thrust did not gain as much territory from the enemy as had been anticipated, the offensive accomplished its main objective: the reestablishment of a continuous line of defense between the two separate army groups. Furthermore it stopped the-Soviet advance toward the Carpathians, as well as scored numerous military victories.

By the end of the offensive the order of battle of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army was as follows:

- Army Commander Lt. Field Marshal Géza Lakatos
- After May 27<sup>th</sup> General Colonel Károly Beregfy

On the Northern flank:

- VII Corps Command (of Miskolc) Lt. Field Marshal Géza Vörös
- 16<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division (Gen. Major Béla Lengyel)
- 18<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Occupational Division (Gen. Major Frigyes Vasváry)
- 68<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division

In the center:

- XI. German Corps Command, Gen. Von Bühnau
- 24<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division (Gen. Major Pintér, later Gen. Major János

Markóczy)

- 101<sup>st</sup> German Light Infantry Division.

On the Southern flank

- VI. Hungarian Corps Command (of Debrecen), Lt. Field Marshal Ferenc kisbarnaki
- 1<sup>st</sup> Mountaineer Brigade (Gen. Major Loskay)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Mountaineer Brigade \*(Gen. Major Fehér, later Col. Makray, Col. Rummy)

Farkas

Later:



### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

- 25<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Artillery Division (Gen. Major Kozma)
- 27<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Light Infantry Division (Gen. Major András Zákó)
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Armor Division directly subordinated to army headquarters. (Gen. Major Zsedényi)
- The 20<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division must be mentioned especially since it was in position on the northern (left) bank of the Dnestr River north of Stanislau, it was only administratively under the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army; tactically, it was subordinated to the XLVI. German Panzer Corps.

#### **Adjacent to the 1<sup>st</sup> Army:**

##### **On the northern flank:**

- The XLVI. German Panzer Corps (Gen.. Rauss)

##### **On the southern flank:**

- The XVII. German Mountaineer Corps. (Gen. Kreysing,)

Opposing the First Hungarian Army were the troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front, under the command of Marshal Petrov with the following units: Opposite the VI. Hungarian Corps, the XVII. Soviet Guard Corps commanded by Gen. Gastylovich. Against the northern flank, the entire 17<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army stood under the command of Gen. Zhuharjew. The 8<sup>th</sup> Soviet Air Army, commanded by Gen. Zhdanov supported these ground forces. The Soviets had a commanding numerical superiority everywhere along the line.

### **1.3. The partisan activity.**

When the Hungarian troops had moved through this area- three years earlier they had been greeted by the population in a very friendly manner. Now, however, the attitude of the population had- damaged. The unfriendly attitude had- been-generated partially by the unfortunate German occupational policies and partially by the closeness of the Soviet troops. In these areas, there were two distinct nationalities, Ukrainians and Poles with unfriendly ethnocentric attitudes toward each other; however the near sighted policies of the German occupation had managed to make them more hostile toward the Germans than toward each other. (This area was Poland prior to 1938, presently it is the Ukraine.)

There was- also a flare up of partisan activity in the wooded areas west of the Bistracza valley. The partisans operated in bands and usually attacked small, lightly armed military supply columns: After the ambush; they very often brutalized their victims before killing them.

After the interrogation of a number of captured partisans, the Hungarian field commanders came to the conclusion that there were three distinct groups of partisans operating in the area:

Group One:- Soviet soldiers who had infiltrated through the lines in civilian clothes and mixed with the population; they operated as a military unit.

Group Two: The Communist members of the local population frequently directed by Soviet soldiers who had parachuted into the area..

Group Three: The Ukrainian nationalist partisans who called themselves the Ukrainian National Army "Ukranska Povstancha Armiya" or for short "UPA" who fought not only the Germans, but also the Communist partisans. Eventually hostilities with the UPA stopped and a rather good relationship has developed with them.

The friendly attitude between the Hungarian troops and the UPA originated from a rather insignificant incident: On June-25<sup>th</sup> the Hungarian troops captured a partisan called Kymeichuk. During the interrogation, in response to the friendly attitude, he stated that he was not a communist,

but a Ukrainian nationalist and-that he would-be willing to bring his leaders to the Hungarian field commander for negotiations. Two days later, he came back with his tender; and a written- agreement was drafted.

The main points of the agreement were the following:

1. The fight against Communism is-common.
2. Any problems occurring between the Hungarian troops and the UPA partisans will be negotiated.
3. The Hungarian troops will honor the interest of the local population.
4. The UPA will send a "liaison officer" to the headquarters of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division.
5. The UPA requests that its sick and wounded members be treated in the Hungarian aid stations-and field hospitals.

In practice the Hungarian field commanders provided the UPA with medical supplies-and some food fur-valuable-intelligence information.

Later, Hungarian field commanders had UPA leaders permanently attached to their staffs. this idea worked quite well; in particular, it eased the security problems.

In the spirit of cooperation UPA leader Bogdan Zubenko published an order to his men contrasting their relationship with the Hungarian troops to that with the German Gestapo. The German Language translation of that order was published under the designation "Befehl Nr. 896/44." <sup>38</sup>

#### 1.4. The Soviet "pocket" at Horod.

The Red Army's primary objective was the capture of the Uzsok, Verecke and Tatár Passes. In particular, very heavy pressure was aimed at the "Tatár Pass"

Stalin himself issued orders stating that the "Tatár Pass" must be taken at any cost The Tatár Pass had earned its name in 1241 when the Mongol - Tatár hordes of Batu Khan passed through it to invade Hungary. Seven hundred and three years later, the Red Army wanted to follow the same route. The VI Corps was defending the Carpathians in front of the Tatár Pass under the command of General Ferenc kisbarnaki Farkas.



**Gen. v. Ferenc kisbarnaki Farkas**

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, after numerous attempts, the Soviets were successful in breaking into the Hungarian line near the village of Horod.

At 2.20 AM., after a sudden artillery and mortar barrage, a Soviet force of 150 - 200 men assaulted one of the strategically located hills defended by two rifle squads of the 7<sup>th</sup> company of the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment The Russians overran the position and formed a wide "pocket" in the Hungarian line. An-immediate counter attack led by the battalion commander himself was unsuccessful in the face of the heavy enemy fire. In the course of the next day the Soviets reinforced their position and laid mines around it During the following night they

brought in further reinforcements. It seemed that the Russians were determined to further exploit their gain. It was not until June 28<sup>th</sup> that a sizable reserve could be brought up, the 13<sup>th</sup> Mountaineer Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jeszenszky. The Mountaineers made a bold but very costly assault in which Colonel Jeszenszky lost his life. By dusk the mountaineers had pushed back the Russians and it appeared that they would be able to cut

<sup>38</sup> Ref: kisbarnaki Farkas: *A Tatárhágó visszajárás*. Kárpát Publishing, Buenos Aires, 1952

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off the enemy, but the assault ground to a halt due to darkness. During the night, however, the Russian brought in new reinforcements again. In view-

of the great number of casualties, Corps Commander General Farkas suspended the assaults. The casualties amounted to 14 officers and 812 enlisted men; among the 23 dead were two battalion commanders.

General Farkas decided on a different plan of attack. Instead of a massive assault, he ordered the formation of sixteen smaller-assault patrols. Each patrol had three combat engineers assigned to it to disable the enemy mines. For several days, the patrols practiced the advancement on similar terrain. Then on July 11<sup>th</sup>, the counter assault began with a 20 minute artillery barrage. The patrols then moved out simultaneously from different locations. The enemy was so con used that the Hungarian troops retook their original positions in two and a half hours with light casualties: 7 dead, 30 wounded. On the other hand, the Soviet losses were quite appreciable: the troops counted 291 enemy bodies cap-

tured numerous enemy soldiers, and sizable enemy materiel: 2 machine guns, 2 automatic rifles, 35

submachine guns, 160 rifles, 2 radios, 50 military overcoats and a large amount of ammunition.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most distinguished men in the assault was a fifteen year old volunteer, Károly Biró, who after being wounded in one of his arms continued to fight and killed two enemy soldiers in close combat. He was awarded the Bronz Medal of Valor by his Hungarian commander and the German command awarded him the Iron Cross, Second Class.



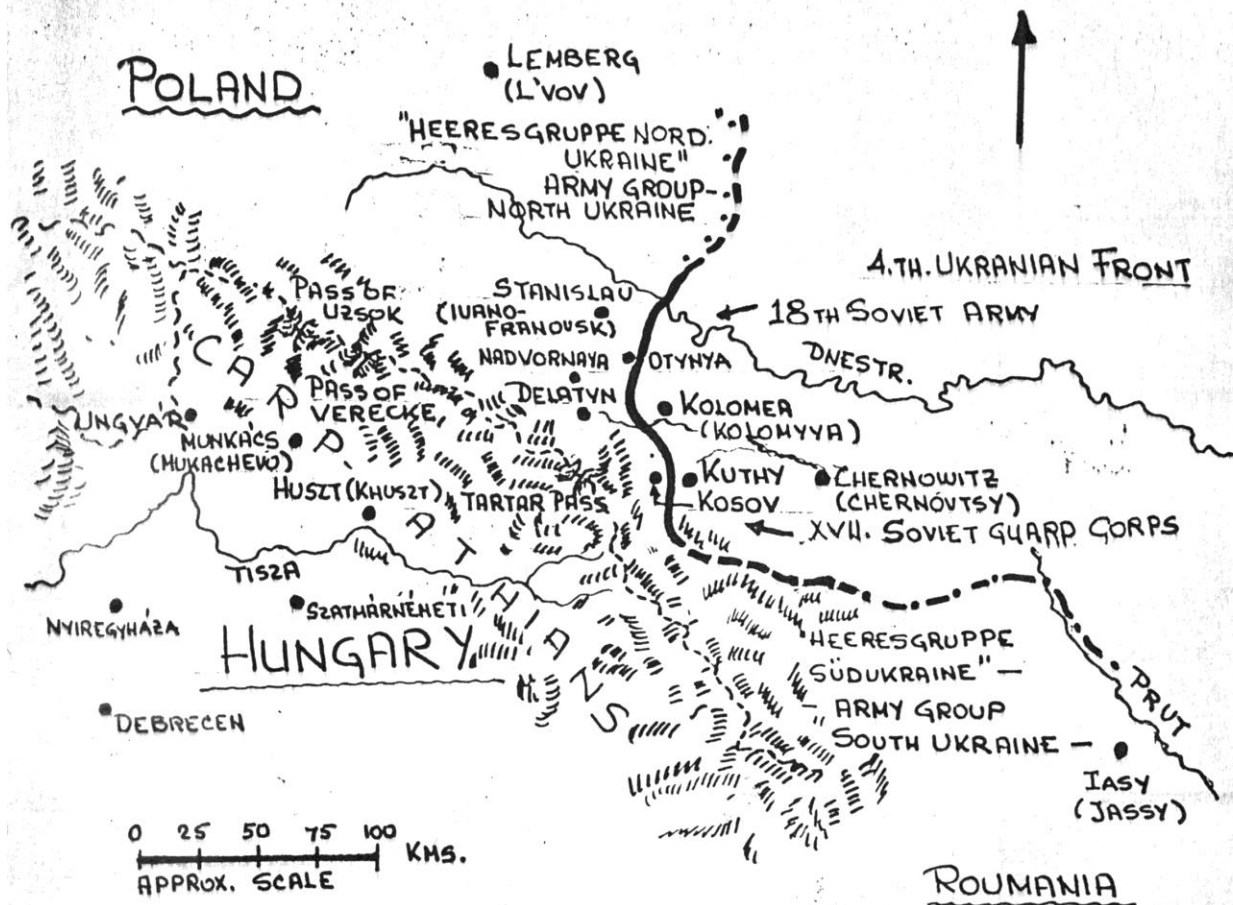
**AAA artillery in the Carpathians**



**Field fortifications in the Carpathians**

<sup>39</sup> Ref: Farkas: *Tatárhágó Visszanéz.* op.cit. Pg. 71.

# PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL



## THE LINE OF DEFENSE ESTABLISHED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE 1ST. ARMY'S LIMITED OBJECTIVE OFFENSIVE.

( APRIL - JULY, 1944.)

- 1ST. HUNGARIAN ARMY
- - - - - 1ST. GERMAN PANZER ARMY
- - - - - 8TH. GERMAN ARMY
- . - . - . ROUMANIAN FORCES.  
(4TH. ROUMANIAN ARMY.)

### 1.5. The summer Soviet offensive.

Geographically, it dwarfed the campaign for Normandy. In four weeks, it inflicted greater losses on the German army than the *Wehrmacht* had suffered in five months at Stalingrad. With more than 2.3 million men, six times the artillery and twice the number of tanks that launched the Battle of the Bulge, it was the largest Allied operation of World War II. It demolished three Axis armies and tore open the Eastern Front. Operation Bagration, the Red Army's spring 1944 blitzkrieg, was designed to support Allied operations in France, liberate Russian territory and break the back of the *Wehrmacht* once and for all.<sup>40</sup>

On June 21<sup>st</sup> 1944 the Soviets opened the offensive against the Middle Army Group and pushed that front sector back with their devastating numerical superiority.<sup>41</sup> The Russian offensive rippled from north to south along the entire front. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Fronts also opened their offensive against the Army Group North Ukraine.

The Soviet Forces broke through the lines of the 4<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> German Panzer Army, which joined the 1st Hungarian Army, and they were advancing toward Lemberg (Lvov). Due to the serious situation, the German Army Group Command pulled out all of the German reserve forces and the XI. German Corps Command from the Hungarian Army Command and reassigned them to the Lemberg (LVOV) area. This pull-out of the German units and of the XI. German Corps Command necessitated the reorganization of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army. The defense sectors assigned to the units had to be lengthened; consequently, the defense was weakened. Of course, the Soviet leadership took note of all these happenings.

As the Soviet offensive wave rippled from North to South, the Russians also opened their attack on July 13<sup>th</sup> against the northern flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army. At 4 A.M. the Soviets started their attack with a massive airstrike and an artillery barrage on the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Although a powerful enemy attack pushed the Hungarian line back at this sector, the Soviets could not break through the line. On July 21, the Soviets carried out two more assaults both of which were repelled by the 16<sup>th</sup> Division. On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Russians continued their attack with new reinforcements from 4 A.M. on. By the evening, the Russians were successful in breaking through the infantry line, but the defenders made a new stand in the artillery gun positions. Further attacks on July 23<sup>rd</sup> forced the 15<sup>th</sup> Division back another 5 km. (3.1 miles) to the "Prinz Eugen" field fortifications where the division made another stand.

As the 16<sup>th</sup> Division pulled back, the northern flank of the neighboring 7<sup>th</sup> Division became unprotected, and the Soviets encircled these Hungarian units still holding out in their original positions. By 7 o'clock in the evening, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment fighting on the northern flank, had to break out in close combat from the Russian ring. On the southern flank of the division, the units commanded by Colonel Deák fell back only on orders during the later part of the day.

The Soviet 24<sup>th</sup>, 161<sup>st</sup>, 226<sup>th</sup> Infantry and 66<sup>th</sup> Guard Divisions were attacking the 16<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Divisions.

The Hungarian Army Command ordered its reserve, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armor Division, to the aid of the battered 16<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Divisions. The Armor Division arrived in the area on July 24<sup>th</sup>. The division was only at half its strength; consequently, it could not radically change the prevailing situation. By the end of the day, the Russians finally broke through the lines and the continuity between the VII Corps and the VI Corps was broken. The Soviets now bore down with their fresh forces on the troops of Colonel Deák and exceedingly heavy combat flared up. Finally, the overpowering enemy began to push these units back, toward the southwest, into the flank of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division still fighting on the original line of defense.

<sup>40</sup> Ref: <http://www.historynet.com/operation-bagration-soviet-offensive-of-1944.htm>

<sup>41</sup> Some of these battles are described in the chapter "The Hussars" of this book.

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Abandoned vehicles of the German 9th Army at a road near Bobruisk



Surrendering German soldiers to Soviet forces



## **2. THE DEFENSE OF EASTERN HUNGARY**

Hungary's all out last effort to defend the homeland from the perils of war.

- 2.1. The Romanian Defection
- 2.2. The Battle of Székely Land.
- 2.3. The Organization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Armies.
- 2.4. The Battle of Torda.
- 2.5. The Recapture of the Old Hungarian City of ARAD.
- 2.6. The Soviet Breakthrough.

### **2.1. The Romanian defection.**

Of all the axis powers Romania had been the most cooperative ally of Germany on the Eastern Front. Also Romania was the first country to commit a sizable military force to the Russian campaign in 1941, and its prime minister General Antonescu was one of Hitler's most trusted friend. As an example of German trust of Romania, the original German plan for surprise occupation of Hungary even included the deployment of Romanian troops.

However, as the Soviet troops were approaching the Romanian borders in the summer of 1944, the Romanian enthusiasm for the Third Reich had gradually cooled off. Although the Germans forbade any Hungarian intelligence activity in Romania it was still carried on to a limited scale. By July 1944 the Hungarian military leadership was certain of a Romanian surrender or “switch over” of sometime in the near future. To discuss that possibility, Gen. dálnoki Veress, the commander of the IX. Hungarian Army Corps located in Transylvania organized a meeting on Aug. 10<sup>th</sup>. The German military leadership had been also invited to attend, and it was represented by Gen. Wilhelm von Grolman of “Army Group South Ukraine”. The German leadership simply dismissed the Romanian defection as an “impossibility” and Gen. von Grolman stated, that if that would happen the war on the Eastern Front would be lost anyway.

The “impossibility” of the Romanian defection became “reality” on Aug. 24<sup>th</sup> 1944, and caught the German leadership by total surprise. During the early morning hours of that day King Michael of Romania issued peace proclamation to the Romanian people, and he named Maniu to be the new prime minister. On the same day, the Fourth Romanian Army in the vicinity of Iasy and the Third Romanian Army south of Tiraspol opened up their lines to the Soviet troops. The troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front at Iasy and the units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front at Tiraspol poured through quickly in large numbers encircling the Sixth German Army south of Kishinev. Furthermore, according to the peace agreement Romania pledged sixteen combat divisions under Soviet command against Germany, and the Romanian troops instantaneously turned their guns on their former allies. The next day, on Aug. 25<sup>th</sup> Romania formally declared war on Germany and Hungary.

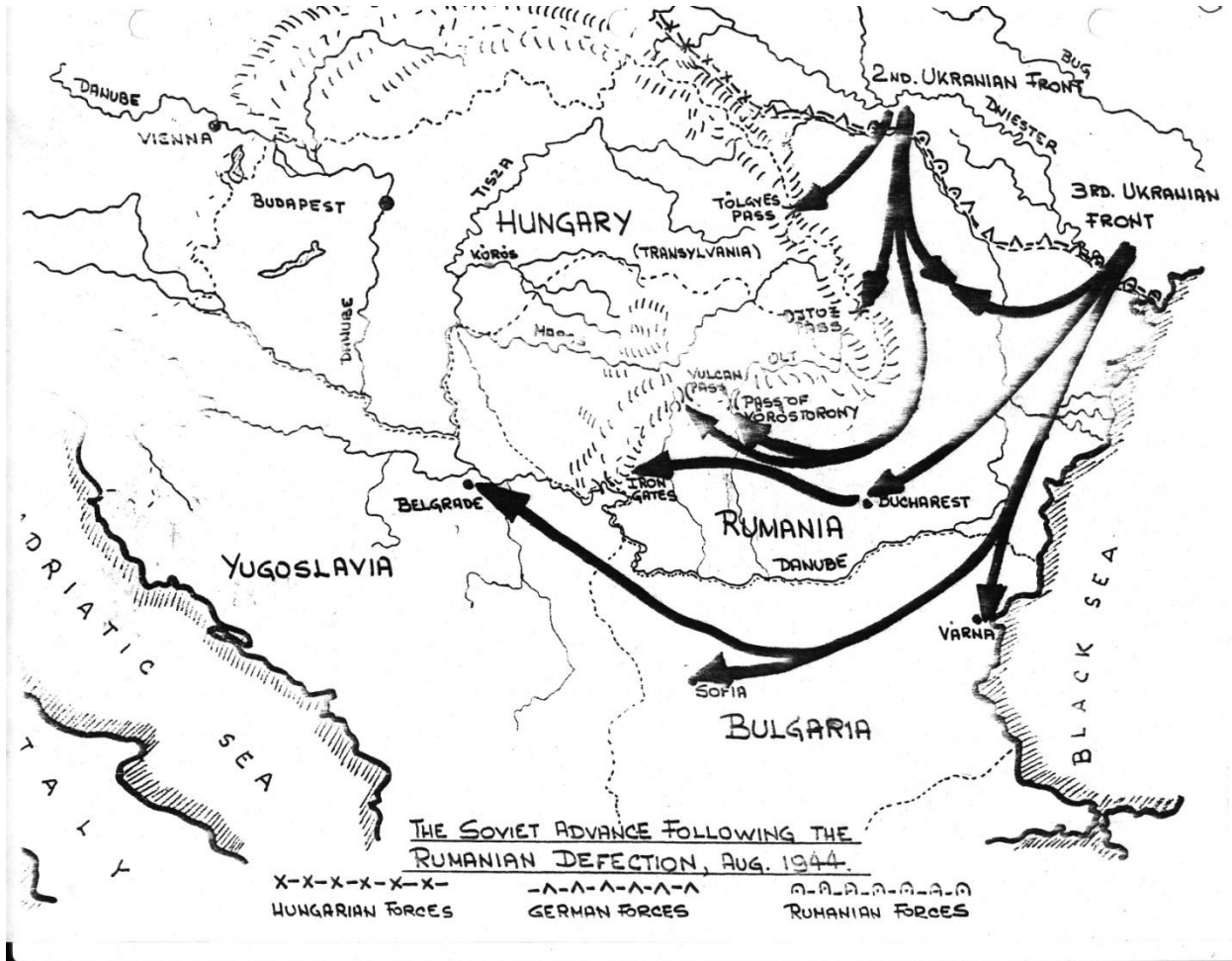
The Romanian defection was detrimental to “Army Group South Ukraine”, commanded by Field Marshal Friessner. The entire front sector collapsed. While most of the units of the Eight German Army on the left flank, commanded by Generaloberst Wöhler, were able to reach the Hungarian border on the Eastern Carpathians, the Sixth German Army on the right flank, commanded by Generaloberst Fretter-Pico, was trapped by the combined Soviet-Romanian forces. Five Corps Commands with eighteen divisions were captured by the Russians. According to conservative estimates, the German Army lost approximately 300,000 men, as P.O.W.s in a few days.

The Soviet leadership was quick to exploit the situation to its fullest advantage. The Soviet Forces split into three directions. The units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front under the command of Marshal Malinovsky turned west toward the passes of the eastern and southern Carpathians. The 40<sup>th</sup> Russian Army toward the Tölgyes Pass, the 52<sup>nd</sup> Russian Army to the Ojtoz (Oituz) Pass, and the 27<sup>th</sup> Army and the 6<sup>th</sup> Tank Army toward the Vöröstorony Pass (Turnu Rosu Pass). The troops of

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the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front commanded by Marshal Tolbukhin took the capital of Romania, Bucharest on Aug. 31<sup>st</sup> and a few days later the 37<sup>th</sup> and the 57<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies invaded Bulgaria although this country was not in a state of war with the Soviet Union. Then the 57<sup>th</sup> Russian Army turned West toward Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia. The 46<sup>th</sup> Army together with the 53<sup>rd</sup> Army of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front turned north toward the Vulcan Pass and the Iron Gates of the Southern Carpathians.

With the Romanian defection the flood gates for the Red Army had been opened in Central Europe and the fate of the entire Carpathian Basin had been sealed.





## 2.2. The battle for Székely-land.

The Székelys (pronounced say'kay's) are a very distinctive ethnic group of the Hungarian Nation. Their manner of speech and dialect, their songs and music, their ballads give the Székelys a prominent characteristic of their own. According to ancient traditions they hold themselves to be the original Hungarian in-habitants of the Carpathian Basin who are the descendents of the people of Prince Csaba (pronounced Chubba) the son of the mighty king of the Huns, Attila. Throughout the centuries they lived in a semi military order on the eastern frontier of Transylvania as the protectors of the eastern borders of Hungary. For centuries they fought the Kun and then the Tatár-Mongol invaders from the east. Later, in 1763 Queen Maria Theresia ordered the formal organization of the "Székely Frontier Guard Regiments" and granted to the Székelys 62,000 "Holds" (approx. 357 sq.km.) of sate land for the specific purpose of supporting their military force.

When in 1940, after 20 years of Romanian occupation northern Transylvania had been returned to Hungary a modernized version of the old military system had been reinstituted. In addition to the regular army units of this area, which formed the 27<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry ("Székely") Division, the "Székely Frontier Guard Militia" had been organized. These units consisted mostly of reservists for the purpose of the temporary defense of the borders until regular army troops could be rushed there in a case of an unexpected enemy (Romanian) attack. The organization of the Székely Militia had been justified not by tradition alone, but by the strategically bad location of "Székely Land" which was surrounded on three sides by Romania and virtually was placed in the grips of the Romanian pincers.

Unfortunately, at the time of the surprise Romanian defection the 27<sup>th</sup> Székely Division was away, deployed in the defense of the north-eastern Carpathian and the only force present in Székely Land was the Frontier Guard Militia of the Székelys.

In August of 1944, at the time of the Romanian defection the defensive forces in Székely Land consisted of 5 Regular Frontier Patrol Battalions, with 8 Mountaineer light artillery batteries Székely Militia Frontier Guard Battalion and 12 Militia Fortification Defense Companies. The average age of the militia men ranged between 40 to 50 years of age. These units were equipped with World War I "Manlicher" rifles. The units did not have any kind of Armor vehicles of tanks at all. On the average each Regular Frontier Patrol Battalion had to patrol 70-80 km. (43-50 miles) while each Militia Battalion had to secure 20 km. (12 miles) of border section, and each artillery battery had to cover 50 km. (31 miles) of border with 4 artillery pieces.

These forces were organized into 5 Frontier Guard Groups; the 67<sup>th</sup>, defending the area around the Bodza and Ojtoz Passes commanded by Colonel Pisky, the 70<sup>th</sup>, defending the border around the Gyimes Pass, commanded by Colonel Ditróy. Colonel Pisky was later very severely wounded at Marosvásárhely.<sup>42</sup>

The 65<sup>th</sup> defending the Békás and Tölgyes Passes, Commanded by Colonel Miskey.

The 69<sup>th</sup> defending the border sector north of the Tölgyes Pass commanded by Colonel Ferenczy.

The 68<sup>th</sup> Group was in reserve in the vicinity of the town Csíkszentmiklós, commanded by Colonel vitéz László Radnóczy<sup>43</sup>.

Upon the fragmentary news of the Romanian defection the commanding generals of each of the Transylvanian Divisions, General István Kozma, of the 25<sup>th</sup> and General András Zákó, of the 27<sup>th</sup>, have requested the relocation of their divisions from the north-eastern Carpathians to Transylvania. This request was accepted by the Chief of the General Staff, but the transportation and reorganization took some time. Knowing the logistics problems, the Chief of the General Staff also or-

<sup>42</sup> Ref. Adonyi: "*A Magyar Katona a II. Világháborúban*" ("The Hungarian Soldier in WWII") Collegial Society of Hungarian Veterans, Klagenfurt 1954. Pg. 224.

<sup>43</sup> Ref. dálnoki Veress: *Magyarország Honvédelme*. op. cit. pp. 42-43

dered the mobilization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Division for the defense of Székely Land. However even the deployment of this division - in spite of all the efforts - could not be accomplished immediately, so the very thin line of defense of the Székely militia had to face the combined Soviet-Romanian onslaught.

Four days after the Romanian defection, on August 27<sup>th</sup>, the Soviet-Romanian forces were already on the attack on the Hungarian border. The first attack was launched at the Ojtoz (Oituz) Pass, where a Romanian Mountaineer Battalion had tried a surprise attack. When the Székelys of that outpost discovered the advancing Romanians, they launched an assault from their positions, and in a furious counterattack had beaten the enemy back with hand grenades. The enemy renewed its attack again and again reinforced with Russian troops and T-34 tanks, but charge after charge failed to break through the pass as the Székelys stood unyielding as Napoleon's Old Guard did at Waterloo, as long as there were able men left.

Another lonely outpost was at the village of Sósmező near the pass. This outpost was held by 70 men of the 24<sup>th</sup> Frontier Patrol Battalion, commanded by First Lieutenant Cseh. This post had beaten off the attacks for an entire week also, until all of the defenders died. This was Ft. Lt. Cseh's last report to his battalion commander: "As long as I am alive not one single Russian or Romanian will set foot on Sósmező."<sup>44</sup>

Also on August 27<sup>th</sup> an entire Soviet battalion dressed in German uniform surprised a Székely company working on its fortifications and massacred it, although later this enemy force was eliminated in a five day battle by the troops of the 68<sup>th</sup> Frontier Guard Group.

The Gyimes and Békás Passes were also the scenes of similar savage and fierce battles. But it was not until September 9<sup>th</sup> when the Russians could break through the Békás Pass, which was defended by a single company, commanded by Captain Ruzska of the 17<sup>th</sup> Frontier Patrol Battalion. A regimental size Soviet force supported by tanks and artillery could not break through the pass till the defenders were eliminated and Capt. Ruzska and most of his men died in the battle.

The Russian-Romanian avalanche however, could not break through at all at the Tölgyes Pass, and the border sector between it and the Bekás Pass. For some reason the Soviets did not begin their attacks here till September 5<sup>th</sup>, which gave a chance for the defense to pre-prepare and well organize itself. Among the other preparations, First Lieutenant Brambring, the commander of one of the mountaineer artillery batteries, volunteered to take a mounted reconnaissance patrol across the border, and obtained very valuable information for the defense. Later, the well directed Hungarian artillery fire was greatly responsible for repelling the enemy attacks. Although the Russians even deployed medium artillery in addition to their standard field artillery support, they could not silence the small but well planned mountaineer cannons.

In spite of the determined and unwavering resistance of the Székelys the combined Russian-Romanian tidal wave was steadily gaining from the South east leaving a trail of terror and death behind, which had made the fight even more fierce and vicious. Such was the case at Gyergyószentmiklós, when this town was retaken by a gallant assault of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment led by Captain Fűrész. They have found many scores of captured Székely soldiers of a supply column along the road shot in the back of the head at very close range by their Soviet captors.

By mid September however the units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Division, commanded by Colonel Czlenner, and the units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> German Mountaineer Division begun to arrive. Although the numerical superiority was still heavily in favor of the Russian-Romanian forces, the initiative begun to alternate. The spirited counterattacks of these divisions with that of the original defenders slowed down the enemy advance and finally halted it for quite some time along the river Maros (Mures). Unfortunately the casualty rate of the defenders was devastating.

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<sup>44</sup>Ref. Adonyi: "*A Magyar Katona ...*" Op.Cit. Pg. 224.

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The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Regiment led by First Lieutenant Mecsekfalvy, took the town of Csikrákos back from the Russians in hand to hand combat on September 10<sup>th</sup>.

On August 25<sup>th</sup> the remnant of the 24<sup>th</sup> Frontier Patrol Battalion, which fought so gallantly around the Ojtoz Pass, had practically perished with its commanding officer Captain Schutt, in its last heroic assault near the city of Szászrégen.

The other units, which had distinguished themselves:

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, commanded by Captain Liphay in retaking a strategically important peak. In this battle Captain Liphay was seriously wounded and lost one of his legs.

The other units of that same regiment were fighting in the vicinity of the village of Kásva, on September 16<sup>th</sup>, where regimental commander Colonel vitéz László Radnóczy<sup>45</sup> was killed. The village itself was retaken here again in close combat by the units of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, led by First Lieutenants Máray and Mecsekfalvy.

On September 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> the valley of the Görgény creek the 23<sup>rd</sup> Frontier Patrol Battalion, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Székely Mountaineer artillery Squadron commanded by Captain Jóny. (By this time the battle strength of the 23<sup>rd</sup> was down to 25% of its original strength.)

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, of the troops commanded by Colonel Harkay in the vicinity of the village of Görgényoroszfalu, the hussar troop commanded by First Lieutenant Nemeskéri Kiss and the Székely Mortar Artillery Battalion, commanded by Captain Babos.

\* \* \*

During all this time, the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the prime fighting force of the Székelys` was still en route from the north-eastern Carpathians and could not take part in the defense of its immediate homeland, nevertheless the defense of Székely-Land was a long chain of events with every link being a hard fought battle with extraordinary courage. The units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Division and especially the Székely Frontier Patrol Battalions displayed unbelievable fortitude and bravery in their determination to defend the traditional eastern frontier of Hungary, and the Székelys proved it again that their spirit and courage will remain that of their ancestors forever.

### 2.3. The organization of the second “Transylvanian” and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Armies.

With the Romanian defection the Soviet invasion of the Carpathian Basin was evident. The Russian intention was further evidenced by the fact that the “Stavka”- the Soviet High Command ordered the majority of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Fronts, the 40<sup>th</sup>, 52<sup>nd</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> Tank, the 46<sup>th</sup>, and the 53<sup>rd</sup> Soviet armies to advance toward the passes of the eastern and southern Carpathians. The Soviet forces were quickly joined by the 1<sup>st</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian Armies also. This mighty force represented about 60 Soviet and 14 Romanian divisions.

To protect Hungary, seven days after the Romanian “about face” on Aug. 30<sup>th</sup>, the Hungarian government ordered the mobilization of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Armies. The mobilization of these two armies was an all out last effort on Hungary's part, since some of the last reserve and replacement units had to be called up.

The following units formed the 2<sup>nd</sup> or “Transylvanian” Army:

- 7<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division of Miskolc,
- 9<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division of Kolozsvár,
- 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of Nagyvárad,
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division,

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<sup>45</sup> Colonel Radnóczy was the commander of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Border Guards of Marosvásárhely



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- 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Mountaineer Brigades,
- a German “SS” Infantry, and a German “SS” Cavalry Divisions.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division had to be pulled out from the front line of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army in the north-eastern Carpathians. Unfortunately, the pullout of these two first class battle divisions seriously weakened the defense there.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, the 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Mountaineer Brigades were commanded by the IX Corps Command under Major General Gyula Kovács. (General Kovacs was formerly the chief of operations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army at the Don.) The 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Replacement Divisions were commanded by the II Corps Command under Major General István Kiss. The entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Command was assumed by Lieutenant General Lajos dálnoki Veress.

The following units constituted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army:

- 12<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division,
- 4<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division,
- 6<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division,
- 1<sup>st</sup> Replacement Hussar Regimental Combat Team,
- 1<sup>st</sup> Field Armored Division and the
- 7<sup>th</sup> Assault Artillery Squadron.

Furthermore, the Hussar Division at that time engaged in the Battle of Warsaw was supposed to be pulled out and transported back to Hungary to join the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The 12<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Replacement Divisions were commanded by the VII Corps Command under Major General Géza Vörös. The remaining units were directly under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army command, for the time being, commanded by Lieutenant General József Heszlényi.

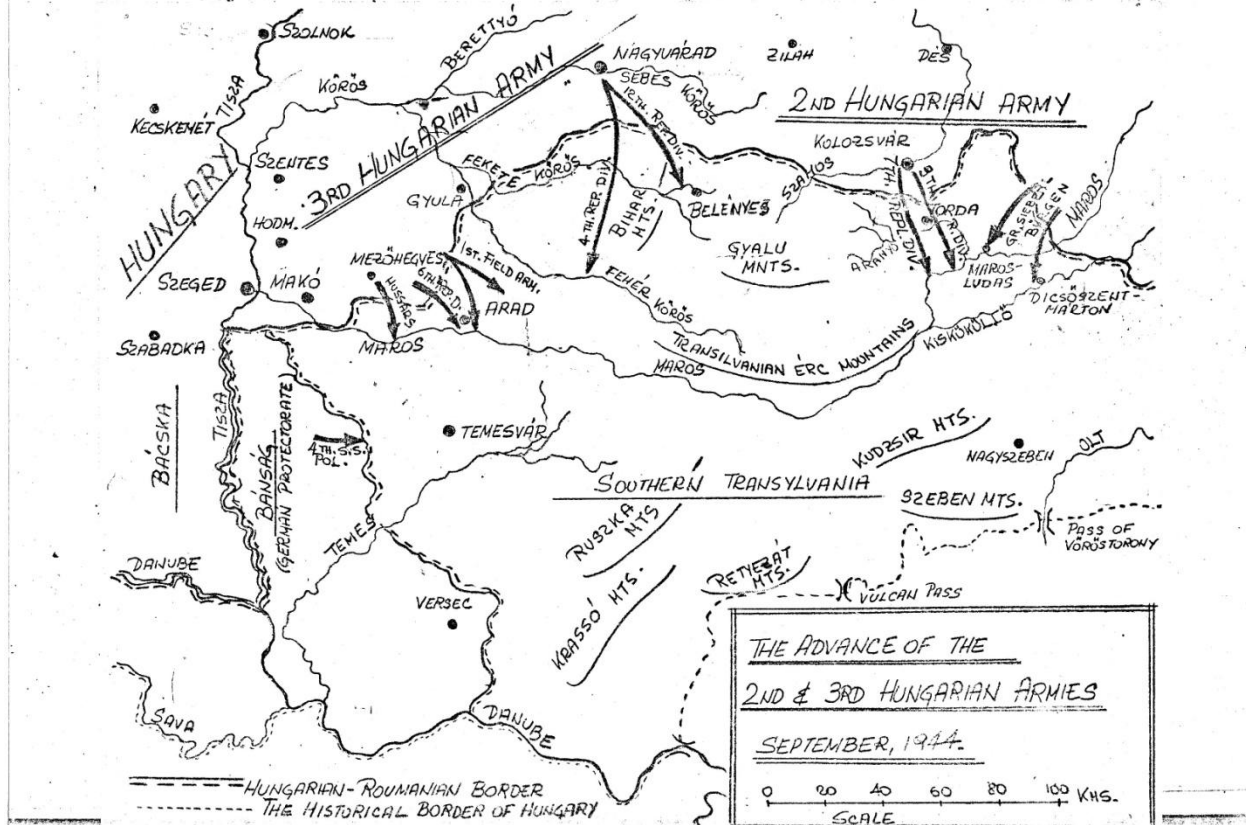


**Lt. Gen. Lajos dálnoki Veres**

The replacement divisions consisted of two infantry regiments instead of three and they could be equipped only in a very scant manner. The infantry consisted of only rifle companies, each company having a total of 6 automatic weapons and they had hardly any anti-tank weapons. The artillery was equipped with World War I 8 cm. cannons. Each replacement division represented a battle strength of 18 infantry rifle companies and 24 artillery pieces. These divisions had not had any armored vehicles at all.

The Hungarian military leadership knew that the ideal line of defense against such an overpowering force would be the southern and eastern Carpathians. They also knew that to reach the southern Carpathians over 300 km. (190 miles) away, than held by the Romanians in just a few days, before the bulk of the Soviet forces get there was an impossible task. Nevertheless, the Hungarian military took the initiative, in order to find a more favorable line of defense than the artificial Hungarian-Romanian border.

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#### 2.4. The battle of Torda.

Although not all of the troops had been assembled, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army began its offensive on September 5<sup>th</sup>, at 6 AM. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Replacement Divisions were spearheading the advance. In spite of the fact that on August 25<sup>th</sup> Romania declared war on Hungary, the Hungarian advance had surprised the Romanians. Many Romanian troops had surrendered, and among the captured Romanians was General Valentianu, the commander of the 20<sup>th</sup> Romanian Division.

The following day, on Sept. 6<sup>th</sup> the Hungarian troops took the town of Torda (Turda) and crossed the river Aranyos. On Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> the Hungarians continued to push forward, forcing the Romanians further back and during that day they reached the river Maros (Mures) and formed several bridgehead positions on the southern bank of the river. In the meanwhile the units of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division and the Mountaineer Brigades began to arrive. The Army command decided on the line of defense south of the town of Torda, along the Aranyos, not because it was a big river, but the terrain was most favorable for the defense there. The advance had served its purpose, it allowed the freshly arrived units to take up their positions undisturbed, so by Aug. 9<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Replacement Divisions began to fall back toward the main line of defense, closely followed by the increasing Soviet and Romanian troops.

Although the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was not up to its full strength due to its casualties in the north-eastern Carpathians, it was a first class battle division. It was commanded by Brigadier General Hollósy-Kuthy, and the chief of operation was Major Adonyi.

The division consisted of the excellent infantry regiment,

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- 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment of Budapest, (Colonel Kelety)
- 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of Nagyvár, (Colonel Böszörményi) . and
- 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of Kolozsvár,

The artillery division consisted of 15 field artillery batteries approximately, of total of 60 artillery pieces and the 10<sup>th</sup> Assault Artillery Squadron, equipped with Hungarian made “Zrínyi” self propelled assault guns. (The artillery was commanded by Colonel Vajda).



The „Zrínyi” assault gun in action

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division was only at its half strength, also due to its casualties in the north-eastern Carpathians, but it was also a battle hardened division of excellent morale. It was commanded by General Major Zsedényi, and the chief of operation was Major Rugonyi. This division was equipped mostly with Hungarian made “Turán” tanks. These tanks weighed 15 tons and were armed with a 50 mm. cannon, compared to the Soviet “T-34/85” tank - they had lighter armor and less fire power, since the Soviet tank weighed 32 tons and it was armed with a 85 mm. cannon. Nev-

ertheless what was lacking in armor plate had been made up with courage, and the Turáns were very formidable opponents to the T-34-s.

Marshal Malinovsky, the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front and the Soviet Military leadership were quick to recognize the advantage the Soviet troops gained by the easy crossing of the Southern Carpathians. (On some maps the Southern Carpathians are noted as “Transylvanian Alps”.) The Soviets wanted to exploit their favorable situation with a quick forward thrust in the Transylvanian Basin to cut off the Hungarian and German troops defending the North-Eastern and Eastern



The „Turán” tanks

Carpathians. The Soviet military wanted to force this breakthrough in the Torda (Turda) and Kolozsvár (Cluj) area. The Soviets concentrated their crack troops, 18<sup>th</sup> Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Guard Division with very strong armor support to this sector. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army Command also assumed that this area would be the most logical place for the Russian main thrust and placed its available best troops in that area.

The first Soviet tanks appeared on September 13<sup>th</sup>, when they wanted to probe the Hungarian line. The Hungarians knocked out seven of them and the rest had turned back. On the next morning, the Russians launched their first major attack, but it was repelled by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Mountaineer Brigades. That afternoon the Russians renewed their attack and succeeded to break into the positions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. In the hard fought close combat, battalion commander Major Lipták was killed also. Then a swift assault by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment led by Major Siprák had thrown the Russians back. Major Siprák was awarded the Gold Medal of Valor for his exemplary personal courage.

On September 15<sup>th</sup> the Soviets launched a new attack, at this time they broke into the Hungarian line and took several strategically important hills. Finally the Russian advance was checked at the outskirts of Torda. An immediate Hungarian counter attack with the available reserve on August

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16<sup>th</sup>, could not gain any appreciable ground under the very heavy Russian artillery barrage.

The Hungarians launched a major counter attack on September 19<sup>th</sup>. It was spearheaded by the 10<sup>th</sup> Assault Artillery Squadron commanded by Captain Hanák, and the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel Böszörményi.



**Col. Géza Böszörményi**

Colonel Géza Böszörményi was originally from Torda, but for twenty five years he could not come home to see his family because Torda belonged to Romania since 1920. On that day leading his regiment he died only a few hundred yards away from his parents grave. On Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> Colonel Böszörményi finally came home to his parents. His men had buried him next to the family's grave.

Although the Hungarian counter attack took back most of the lost positions, it could not throw the Russians back completely.

For the next two days there was relative quiet on the lines, both sides recuperating from the heavy casualties, than the Soviet launched an all out attack again.

The Soviets prepared their attack with a one hour artillery and rocket barrage, than the units of the 18<sup>th</sup> Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Guard Division attacked, supported by 50 to 60 T-34 tanks, with a Romanian division attacking on the left flank. The units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Division, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and the 10<sup>th</sup> Assault Artillery Squadron had blunted the attack.

By noon the Soviets managed to break in to the Hungarian line, but the units of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division stopped the Russian advance in a bloody close combat at the outskirts of Torda. At the break-through, the units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division were fighting desperately, trying to seal up the line of defense. By the end of the day the Hungarian casualties mounted to 1200 men, but the Russian advance had been checked again.

During that day, the action of Ensign Bozsóki is especially noteworthy. The 10<sup>th</sup> Assault Artillery Squadron was equipped with Hungarian made "Zrínyi" self-propelled guns. The "Zrínyi" weighed 33 tons and was armed with a 105 mm. howitzer. It was an equal opponent to the 32 ton Soviet T-34s and 46 ton ISU-152s.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, in most of the encounters they had been outnumbered at least 3 to 1 by the Soviet Armor.

On that morning, on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, Ensign Bozsóki of the Assault Artillery Squadron was ordered to stop an advancing Soviet tank unit. Bozsóki with 6 Zrínyis in a daring close range attack surprised the enemy and in a furious fire duel destroyed all of the 18 Soviet tanks of the group, without losing any of his Zrínyis.

Then an encircled Hungarian battalion requested urgent help. Bozsóki undertook the task himself with his own Zrínyi, leaving the other five guns behind in position. While he was supporting the battalion a new Soviet armor attack came and in that armor battle the outnumbered Zrínyis had been hit, disabled and all but two of the crewmen killed.

After dark Ensign Bozsóki slipped through the Russian line on foot and found two of his men alive, but wounded. One of them un-conscious, at the scene of the battle he also found, that two of the hit Zrínyis could move. He placed the wounded in one of the self-propelled guns and drove it back to the Hungarian line, where he left word for his squadron commander and returned the second time to drive the other movable Zrínyi Back. After he returned the second time to the Hungarian line - with the recently arrived help of. 25 volunteers and 4 Zrínyis - they broke through the Russian line and brought back all the dead bodies and the remaining 3 disabled assault guns. Ensign Bozsóki was awarded the "Gold Medal of Valor" for his action.

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<sup>46</sup> ISU-152; Soviet "Joseph Stalin" self propelled gun, weight: 46 tons, armament: 152 mm howitzer.

It was very doubtful by the end of the day that the exhausted and outnumbered defenders could fight off another attack, but at that night reinforcements had arrived. The 23<sup>rd</sup> German Panzer Division with 2 panzer grenadier regiments and with 50 German "Tiger" tanks. With the new reinforcements on the next day, on Sept. 24<sup>th</sup> a new counter attack was launched, which pushed the enemy back almost to the original line of defense.

Although there were several more joint Russian-Romanian attacks, none of them were of the magnitude as the ones on Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, and the defense had repelled them all. The line of the defense was held till October 8<sup>th</sup>, when the troops were ordered to fall back due to the new developments in the Debrecen - Nagyvárad area.

The Battle of Torda was the first major battle fought within the Carpathian Basin. In reality, it was a series of attacks and counterattacks fought with exceptional bravery on both sides and also both sides suffering great casualties and losses. As an example, during the Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> counterattack the Hungarians counted 200 enemy bodies on one of the retaken strategic hills. Credit must be given to the troops of the elite 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Guard Division, which have fought so well. In the Battle of Torda the estimated Soviet losses were about 8-10,000 casualties, 2500 prisoners, 150 tanks, 250 artillery pieces and 25 planes destroyed or captured.

The lion's share of the battle on the Hungarian side was borne by the units of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, nevertheless the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division had suffered great casualties also. Most of the attacks and counterattacks ended in bloody close combats fought with hand grenades and bayonets. Special credit must be given to the outnumbered Hungarian infantry, which had suffered 85% of all the casualties on the Hungarian-German side. By Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup> the infantry units were down to less than 50% manpower strength, despite the replacements. As an example, the Hungarian casualties on a single day on Sept 22, amounted to 1200 men.

In spite of the fact that the Battle of Torda was one of the major battles fought within the Carpathian Basin, very little if any mention is made of it in both the German and Russian war literature. Consequently, the English language literature makes no mention of it either since it usually utilizes German and Russian sources describing the action on the Eastern Front.

The probable reason why the Battle of Torda is not dealt with, may be rationalized as follows: The German sources do not mention much of it, since until Sept. 24<sup>th</sup> it was fought exclusively by Hungarian troops throughout its bloodiest days, and the German involvement began only with the arrival of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Division. The Soviets don't mention it, since they might find it embarrassing that the mighty Red Army, which had averaged a daily advance of 3 km. in the spring and summer of 1944, was stopped cold for a month by the forces of a small country.

## **2.5. The recapture of the old Hungarian city of Arad**

The assembly and mobilization of the units under the command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army command was not accomplished as quickly as that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army at Torda. The reserve divisions rushed here consisted of mostly poorly e-quipped replacement units. Furthermore, the initiative was plagued by indecision, and valuable time had been lost.

Army commander General Heszlényi wanted to order his troops to take action on Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>, but several direct orders from the government at Budapest postponed the action for ten days till Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>. Allegedly, the government's action was taken on the advice of some Hungarian diplomats in Switzerland, but actually the government's indecision has made very little sense if any, when one considers the fact that the military action in the Torda area begun on Sept 5<sup>th</sup> anyway. During these ten days, the Soviets crossed the strategically important passes of the Southern Carpathians undisturbed, and continued to assemble for the assault on the Hungarian Great Plains. Unfortunately, even less credit could be given to the German military and political leadership. At this time there were still appreciable German forces present in the Ploesti area, about 75 miles south of the Carpathians guarding the oil fields. These German units could have taken possession of the passes long

before the Russians had reached them, and could have held them easy for a long period of time to give the Hungarian defense more time, or even give a chance to the Hungarians to reach them from the north. But the Germans even overlooked the possibility of a few easy airstrikes on the passes, so the Soviet mechanized and armor columns had crossed undisturbed the Vulcan and Iron Gates passes on Sept. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>.

During all that time the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was waiting for orders along the Romanian - Hungarian border. Facing south on the left flank of the army the 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division stood, under the VII Corps command, in the center of the army the Field Armored Division took up positions facing east, and on the right flank of the army the 6<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division and the Replacement Hussar Regimental team were located.

Finally, on Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army could begin its operation also. The Armored Division spearheaded the advance. The division's forward thrust met head on with developing attack of a Romanian cavalry division. In a brief encounter the Romanian cavalry had been dispersed, which fled quickly leaving its dead and wounded behind. The Armored Division pursuing the retreating enemy continued its advance: with its main task force toward the city of Arad, however the 6<sup>th</sup> Division had difficulty in breaking through the Romanian line so some of the units of the Armored Division turned south-east into the back of these Romanian forces, forcing these troops to retreat quickly also.



Col. Vastagh

The Romanians did not even attempt the defense of Arad, so the first advancing units of the Armored Division under the command of Colonel Vastagh had retaken this old Hungarian city after 20 years of Romanian occupation.

On the right flank, the Hussars were also successful. They also broke through the Romanian resistance and by 2 o'clock that afternoon had reached their objective, the river Maros (Mures), and even crossed it with several reconnaissance patrols toward the city of Temesvár (Timisoara).

On the left flank, the units of the VII Corps pushed the Romanians back also, and reached the valley of the river Fehér Kőrös (Crisul Alb) and took the town of Belényes (Beius).

The first phase of the operation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army had been accomplished swiftly and without any appreciable casualties. It is true however that these operations were against Romanian and not the much better equipped Soviet forces, and the power balance was about even between the opposing forces at this time, but nevertheless the quick success even surprised some of the skeptics at Budapest.

## 2.6. The Soviet Breakthrough.

In spite of the success of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army, the Hungarian military leadership did not have any illusions. It knew, that the poorly equipped and outnumbered reserve and replacement infantry units cannot hold off long the mechanized and tank units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front, assembling in southern Transylvania.

Soon after the Romanian defection the Hungarian military leadership had asked for German help, in the form of military equipment; mostly automatic weapons, and antitank guns for the Hungarian troops, and for the dispatch of German Panzer Divisions to the area.

Earlier by coincidence on the day of the Romanian defection, General János Vörös, the chief of the Hungarian general staff visited the supreme German headquarter, the OKW<sup>47</sup> where he was received by Hitler, and General Guderian, the chief of the German general staff. At these discus-

<sup>47</sup> Ober Kommando der Wehrmacht



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sions both Hitler and General Colonel Guderian had promised help. On August 31<sup>st</sup> General Guderian paid a visit to General Vörös in Budapest repeating these promises, stating that the German leadership will withdraw the German armies from the Balkans and some of these units will be deployed for the defense of Hungary. Then on September 12<sup>th</sup>, General Vörös had been invited to the OKW again by Hitler himself, when Hitler told General Vörös, that he decided on the strengthening of the Eastern Front at the expense of the Western and promised five divisions to the defense of Hungary.

In the meanwhile, on Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, General Greiffenberg, the German military attaché to Hungary conveyed the official decision of the OKW to the Hungarian Government. According to the decision the following German units would be deployed in Hungary within a Week: <sup>48</sup>

- III Corps Command,
- 13<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division,
- SS Police Division from Belgrade,
- 18<sup>th</sup> SS Infantry Division,
- two Panzer brigades and
- probably the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division.

It was high time by September 18<sup>th</sup>, that these German promises would have been fulfilled, but unfortunately so far only one German division had arrived, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Division, which was deployed at Torda. The rest of the German help was late, where it was needed the most, to support the infantry divisions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Hitler's statement of strengthening the Eastern Front on the expense of the Western was an empty political trick, since by this time he decided on exactly the opposite; the German Army was in preparation for its great counter offensive to be carried out on the Western Front, in the Ardennes by December 1944.

The overall odds on this front sector were very heavily in favor of the Soviets anyway. Army Group South defending Eastern Hungary consisted of four armies, the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army, and the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Armies representing a total battle strength of approximately 30 divisions, 3500 artillery pieces, 300 tanks and 500 airplanes, and the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army which existed only on paper at this time. Opposing the south-eastern section of this army group stood the troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front, consisting of 9-10 armies, representing 60 divisions, 10,000 artillery pieces, 800 to 1000 tanks and 1000 airplanes, and 14 Romanian divisions, now under Soviet command. The softest section of the defense was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army with its reserve and replacement infantry divisions.

After the unsuccessful attempt at Torda, the Soviet military leadership decided on a new location to force a breakthrough. The "Stavka", the Soviet High Command, picked the Nagyvárad-Arad area, primarily because the terrain here was most suited for a quick armor advance, since the Great Hungarian Plain had offered very little, if any natural obstacles. Second, because with a successful and quick forward thrust here, the entire Army Group South could be cut off. Truly, the Soviet leadership correctly evaluated the strategic situation, and drew a very logical conclusion. To insure a quick military success Marshal Malinovsky, the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front, concentrated to this area nearly one third of his combat strength; the 46<sup>th</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup> Armies and the 6<sup>th</sup> Tank Army representing 20 to 25 divisions, and nearly one half of his armor strength, about 400 tanks.

The German military leadership had also recognized the situation, but for lack of anything else, General Colonel Friessner had secretly resigned to the fact, that the next hard line of defense would have to be along the Lake Balaton, Budapest and the Mátra mountains, which ment the loss

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<sup>48</sup> Reference: dálnoki Veress "*Magyarország Honvédelme...*" op.cit.

of 75% of Hungary.

Some military historians designate October 6<sup>th</sup> as the day of the Soviet offensive, but in reality it began on September 18<sup>th</sup>, with an increasing pressure applied to the defense, as more and more Soviet troops joined the offensive, which by October 6<sup>th</sup> had reached its climax.

On September 18<sup>th</sup>, on the left flank of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army, an unexpected Soviet Romanian attack - coupled with an unfortunate mistaken own air strike in the vicinity of Belényes (Beius) - had caused heavy casualties to the 12<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division. Furthermore the mistaken air strike caused confusion and this division was pushed back to its original starting point by September 26<sup>th</sup>, to the southern edge of the city of Nagyvárad (Oradea). Fortunately two fine elite units had arrived to the division, the 53<sup>rd</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup> Frontier Guard battalions, on this day. The spirited counterattacks of these elite units on September 26, 27, and 28 had checked the Soviet advance and the defense had been stabilized along the Pece creek. This line of defense was held in the face of the ever increasing enemy pressure till October 12<sup>th</sup>, when the Hungarian and German units in that area had to retreat on orders, due to the prevailing situation behind them around the city of Debrecen.

Against the center of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army the Soviet offensive began on September 20<sup>th</sup>, when the armored vanguard units of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army overran the infantry units of the 6<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division in the vicinity of Arad. The units of the Field Armored Division under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Németh counterattacked quickly to save the situation. Considering not only the size of the opposing armored units, but also the relative size of the tanks, the Hungarian counterattack was similar to the fight of the bull, and the bulldog. After Lt. Colonel Németh's unit engaged the Soviet armored units, with quick simulated retreats and reengagements induced the Soviet tanks to an unfavorable terrain where the Hungarians suddenly re-attacked with German "Stuka" air support. The Hungarian unit destroyed 23 Soviet tanks without losing any tanks of their own. This successful counterattack caused the Russians to revert to cautious activity for several days until the main body of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Army had converged to the area.

Another unit, which distinguished itself in the defense of Arad, was the 14<sup>th</sup> (regular) Infantry Regiment from the city of Eger. This spirited unit took the initiative at every opportunity and scored numerous small victories.

By September 24<sup>th</sup> the Soviet 53<sup>rd</sup> Army was ready to take the initiative again and with its devastating superiority renewed its attack. The cities of Arad and Makó fell to the Russians. The units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army made a new stand along the towns of Mezőhegyes and Hódmezővásárhely and some of them were preparing for a counterattack. On that day the 7<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Assault Artillery Squadron, commanded by Captain Pal Harasztosi Török had arrived to aid the battered infantry units of the II. Reserve Corps Command.

The action of this squadron is so noteworthy that it will be described in some detail here:

The unit was equipped with 30 German made "Sturmkanone 40" self-propelled guns. These self-propelled guns weighed 26 tons, and were armed with 7.65 cm cannons, their armor piercing shell was capable of penetrating the Soviet T-34 and JS-52 tanks. This gun was one of the most modern weapons the Hungarian Army had.

According to the received orders, the Assault Artillery Squadron was to support one of the infantry battalions of the 6<sup>th</sup> Replacement Division to retake the village of Csanádpalota. Captain Török led his 2<sup>nd</sup> Battery to the action. While the Hungarian battalion was still assembling four Soviet T-34-s surprised it, inflicting heavy casualties on the unit. The Hungarian self-propelled guns immediately attacked, destroying one of the Soviet tanks and pursuing the rest back toward the village, covering a 12 km. distance in 20 minutes. Then the battery, with the support of the infantry retook the village where they captured 4 damaged T-34, 13 vehicles, 4 antitank guns and took 25 soviet prisoners. It was learned from the prisoners, that the units of an elite Russian Guard Tank Brigade was spearheading the Soviet attack here.

The battery, commanded by First Lt. Kőszeghy held the village until it received orders to fall back during the night, to the original line of defense. During the withdrawal, the battery received

another Soviet attack in which it has fought to its last man alive. At the cost of their own 9 self-propelled guns in a savage "to the death duel" they destroyed approximately 20 Soviet tanks.

In the meanwhile the 1<sup>st</sup> battery supported the 23<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Division in the defense of Hódmezővásárhely where it had destroyed or damaged 16 enemy tanks without any losses. From September 26<sup>th</sup> to October 3<sup>rd</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> batteries supported the counterattacks of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division toward Makó during which time they destroyed 7 more Soviet tanks. On Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup> the last 4 remaining self-propelled guns defended the town of Orosháza with the units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Armored Division. Then on October 7<sup>th</sup> these last able guns supported the units of the Replacement Hussar Regiment and the Armored Division in the bitter fight at the bridgehead position of Szentes. During this hard fought and savage battle these last self-propelled guns were disabled, where also the commanding officer of these defenders, Colonel Vastagh had been killed. On October 9<sup>th</sup> the remaining men of the squadron continued to fight as an infantry unit in the defense of the town of Csongrád. It is estimated that this fine battle unit at the sacrifice of their own 30 self-propelled guns had destroyed or disabled 110 enemy tanks during that two weeks period.

While the deadly combat was raging around Makó, in a surprise attack about 75 km. away a 300 tank Soviet Armored force broke through the thin defenses of the 20<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division in the vicinity of the town of Gyula. The Soviet tanks using "Blitzkrieg" tactics bypassed the isolated infantry pockets and in a close range firefight slugged it out with the Hungarian field artillery. After several hours of savage fight, where both sides suffered heavy casualties, the Soviet tanks managed to silence the Hungarian artillery and continued to press forward, leaving the battered Hungarian infantry to the second wave of the attack.

The Soviet advance split into two direction; while the main thrust continued north toward the city of Debrecen, the second armored column turned north-west toward the town of Szolnok, an important crossing on the River Tisza. In the meantime, the armored vanguards of the 46<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army pressing forward due west along both banks of the river Maros had reached the Tisza river, also at the city of Szeged.

In spite of the great sacrifices, the Soviet advance - which was spearheaded by very strong tank units everywhere - could not be checked anymore. General József Heszlényi did not have any more fresh armored units to throw in the battle, while Marshal Malinovsky seemingly had an inexhaustible source of fresh tank forces.

On the right flank of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army, a disastrous situation had developed. While General Heszlényi was trying to build up a new line of defense along the Tisza between Szolnok and Szeged, the Tisza, downstream from Szeged, for approx. 125 km., was virtually unprotected. The promised German help from "Army Group F" did not take over this defense sector with any appreciable force. The only military forces present here, (in the Bácska) were the units of the 5<sup>th</sup> Hungarian District Command consisting of four Frontier Guard battalions, one field artillery battery (4 artillery pieces), and a hussar troop. These units did not even represent the combat strength of a division. The only German force arriving here was a German Assault artillery unit, commanded by General Kühlwein. Consequently, the units of the 46<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army on October 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> crossed the Tisza at Magyar-Kanizsa and Titel and took the city of Szabadka (Subotica) on October 11<sup>th</sup>, then the Soviet XXXI Corps pressed due north-west and reached the Danube around the town of Baja on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. In these greatly uneven combats the 16<sup>th</sup> Frontier Guard Battalion had distinguished itself especially with its courageous counterattacks.

The Russian troops also managed to cross the Tisza in the vicinity of Szentes and advanced to the city of Kecskemét, where they ran into the arriving Hussar Division from the Battle of Warsaw. Here the hussars on October 11<sup>th</sup>, in a quick and furious counterattack threw these Russians back across the Tisza.

With these events, the great Soviet breakthrough had expired and with the exception of the vicinity of Debrecen a relative quiet set in the front for a few weeks, with both sides recuperating from their heavy casualties and reorganizing their troops. The attention of both military leaderships

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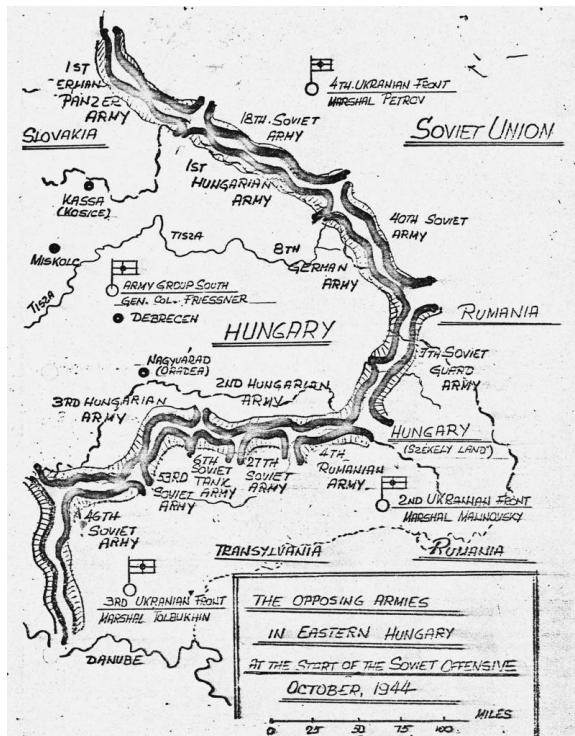
was directed at this time toward the developing tank battle at Debrecen.

At long last, the overdue German help was beginning to arrive. Unfortunately, all that this help could do was to try the salvage the situation. To throw back the Russians to the original line of defense with the available means was out of question. The Germans concentrated their counterattack around Debrecen in order to stop and isolate the Russian forces there to allow the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian and the 8<sup>th</sup> German Armies to withdraw from Transylvania. These two armies were in the grave danger of being cut off, in which case the total annihilation of most of these units was evident.

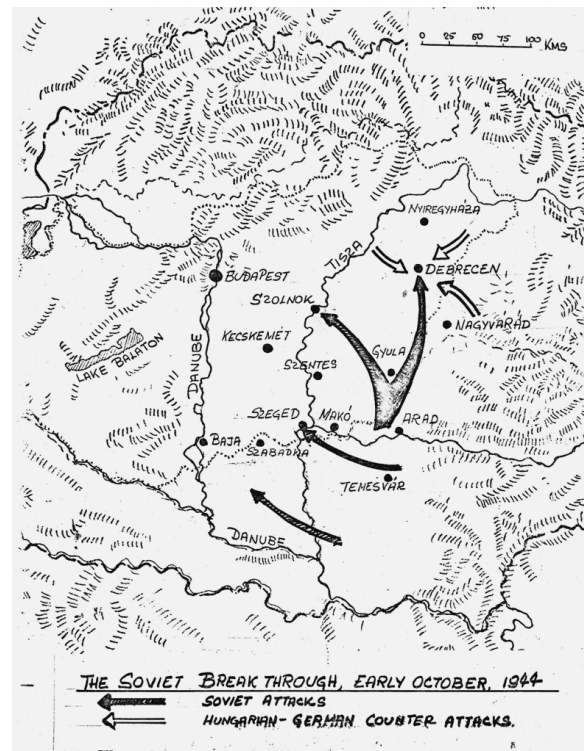
Three German Panzer Divisions the 1<sup>st</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup>, under the command of the III German Panzer Corps counterattacked toward Debrecen, while the 24<sup>th</sup> Panzer and the 4<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Divisions under the command of the IV German Corps conducted a diversional attack south-east from Szolnok toward the town of Mezőtúr. The attacking German forces clashed with the XIII Armored, the IV and VI Guard Cavalry Russian Corps, in one of the greatest clash of Armor on the Eastern Front. The battle lasted for nearly three weeks and at the conclusion both sides claimed victory and with justifiable reasons.

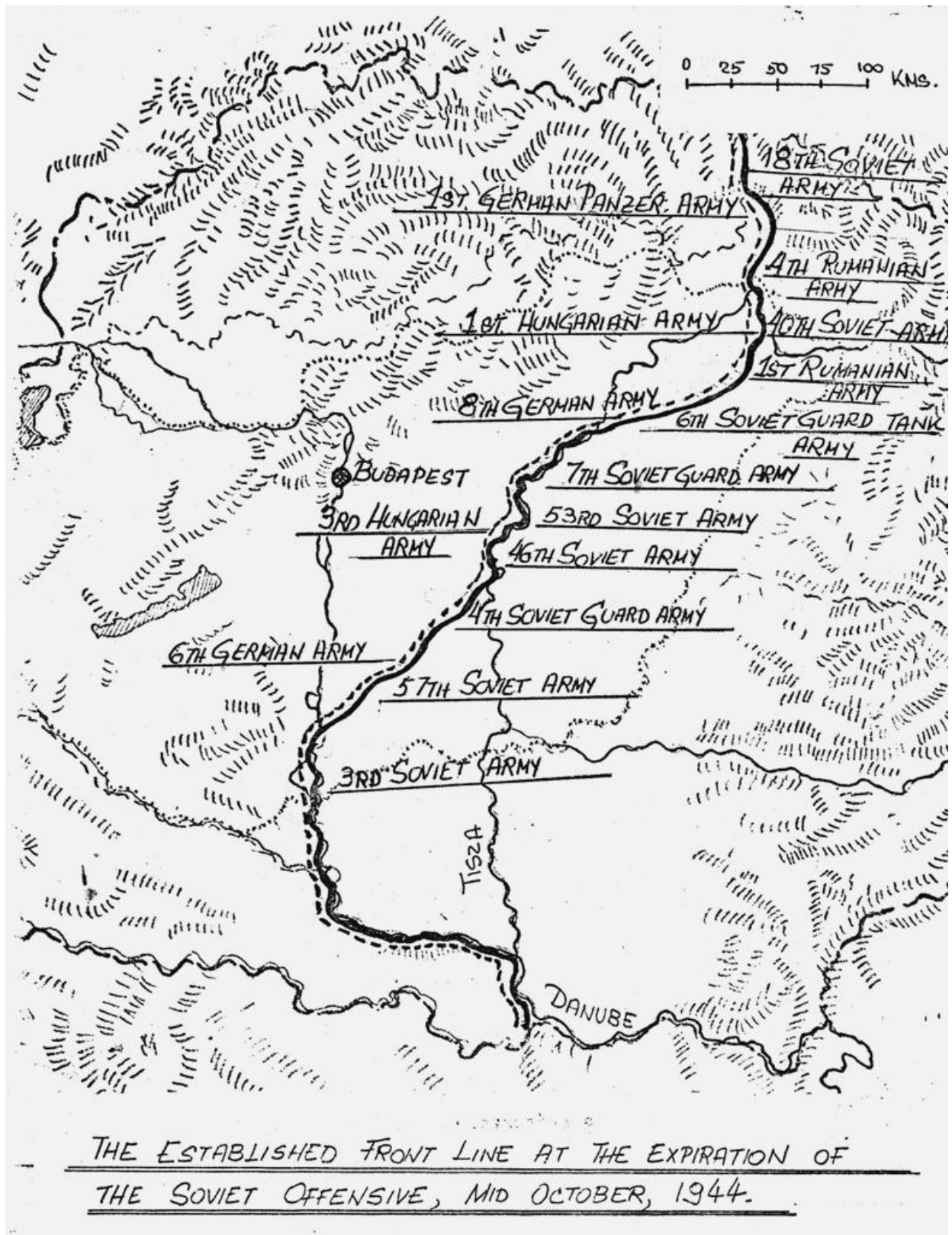
The German military leadership accomplished its purpose, because it succeeded to destroy these first Russian forces that broke into the Hungarian Great Plains and saved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian and the 8<sup>th</sup> German Armies from the encirclement and secured the necessary time for their orderly withdrawal with relatively small casualties. The only exception to that were the units in the Nagyvárad area, the 12<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Reserve, the 4<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Replacement and the 76<sup>th</sup> German Divisions. These isolated divisions had to smash their way through the Russian ring. Suffering heavy losses, but nevertheless these troops had also reached the Tisza.

The Soviet troops could be considered victorious also because in spite of their great casualties with their fresh reinforcements they made large territorial gains and remained in possession of



one area east of the Tisza.





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**Soviet T-34s bearing infantry advancing toward Budapest over the Hungarian plains.**



### **3. THE BATTLE FOR BUDAPEST.**



**Commander in Chief, General Colonel Károly Beregfy,  
inspects the defenses around Budapest.**

- 3.1. The Soviet Thrust Toward Budapest
- 3.2. The Red Pincers Close.
- 3.3. The Relief Attempts of Budapest.
- 3.4. Gloria Victis.

#### **3.1. The Soviet thrust toward Budapest.**

In early November the Soviet forces stood poised to overrun the Carpathian Basin and to take Hungary's heart, Budapest. The Soviet Stavka did not spare fresh reinforcements in order swiftly to accomplish this important strategic task. The main thrust was to be carried out by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front commanded by Marshal Malinovsky, aided on the Northern flank by the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front under Marshal Petrov, and from the south by the armies of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front led by Marshal Tolbukhin.

This mighty force consisted of the following armies, from north to south:

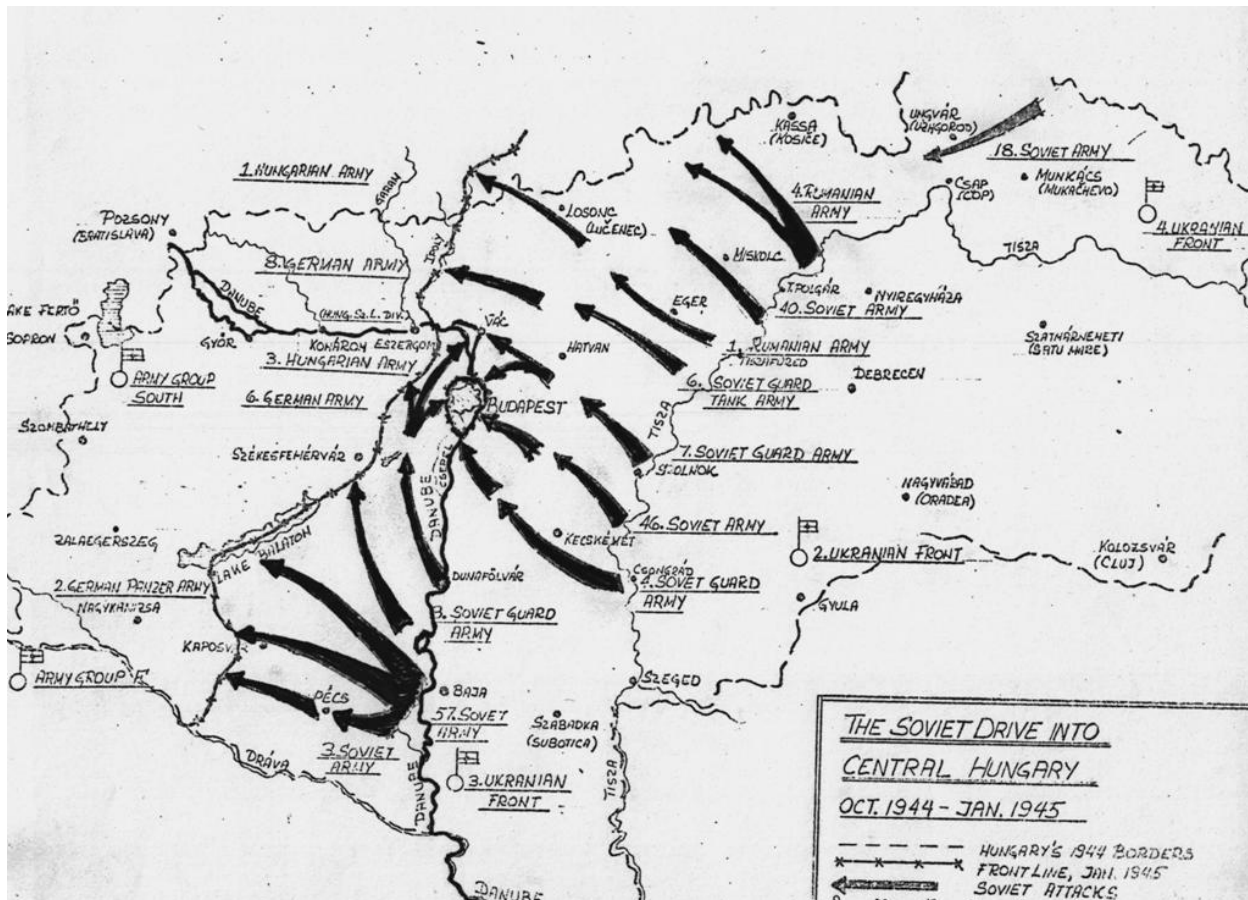
- 18<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army
- 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian Army
- 27<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army
- 40<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army
- 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army

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6<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guard Army  
 7<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guard Army  
 46<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army  
 4<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guard Army  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Guard Army  
 57<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army

Opposing the Soviet onslaught were the battle weary under strength units of Army Group South commanded by Gen. Friessner and later by Gen. Wöhler, joined by Army Group A on the north, commanded by Gen. Harpe and on the south by "Army Group F" under Gen. Weichs. From north to south the defending armies were:

1<sup>st</sup> German Panzer Army (Gen. Heinrich)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army (Gen. László)  
 8<sup>th</sup> German Army (Gen. Wöhler)  
 6<sup>th</sup> German Army (Gen. Fretter-Pico)  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army (Gen. Heszlényi)  
 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army (Only after early December).



All of these armies in particular the Hungarian armies consisted of under-strength units which had suffered previously heavy casualties. The average numerical superiority in the favor of the Russians was at least three to one not considering their superior armor strength, which was even greater than that.

While the main battleground became central Hungary south-east of Budapest, the 1<sup>st</sup> Hun-

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garian Army still holding its positions in the north-eastern Carpathians under the command of Lt. Field Marshal Gen. László was in the grave danger of being cut off from the south-westerly direction, The 27<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Soviet Armies applying their main thrusts from their crossings at the River Tisza necessitated the withdrawal of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army. The success of the withdrawal hinged on the southern flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army being secured by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Division, commanded by Gen. Major Czlenner. This division with its limited objective counterattacked in the vicinity of the city of Nyíregyháza and fulfilled its mission in a brilliant manner. At the same time on the northern flank of the army the 16<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions under the V Corps command, built up a new line of defense in bitter battles in the vicinity of Kassa (Kosice).

The ferocity of the fighting is indicated by the fact, that even Corps commander General Major Álgya-Pap<sup>49</sup> was seriously wounded. In these battles the 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commanded by Col. Barakonyi, its 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in particular, commanded by Lt. Col. Illés, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry



**Gen. v. Zoltán Álgya Pap**  
commanding general of the  
V. Corps was awarded the  
golden medal of honor in  
the battle in the vicinity of  
Kassa

Regiment commanded by Col. Endrődy distinguished themselves. As an example of the overpowering enemy pressure, and the spirit of the Hungarian troops, it should be noted that one of the antitank platoons of the 19<sup>th</sup> Regiment commanded by Ensign Németh had knocked out seven Soviet tanks on a single day<sup>50</sup> while the other troops fought off the massive Russian attacks. Although the heavy enemy pressure continued, a new line of defense could be built up again on this front sector northeast of Budapest, and for the time being the defense could be stabilized there.

Despite of the heavy fighting in northeastern Hungary the attention of both of the opposing military leaderships was directed toward Budapest. On November 9<sup>th</sup> the armies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front with great overwhelming power began their drive toward the heart of Hungary. The

Soviet troops successfully crossed the River Tisza at four places: The units of the 40<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army at Tiszapolgár, the 6<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guard Army at Tiszafüred, the 7<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guard Army at Szolnok, and somewhat later the 4<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guard Army at Csongrád.

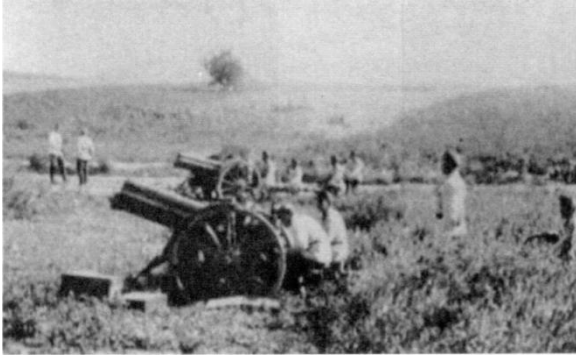
Although the Russian advance was marked everywhere by bitter and bloody fighting, particularly in the vicinity of the city of Kecskemét, where the units of the Hussar Division put up some very stiff resistance, the armored vanguards of the Soviet troops managed to reach the outskirts of Budapest by October 29<sup>th</sup>. By December 9<sup>th</sup> they reached the Danube north of capital by the town of Vác. The Russian advance was finally checked along this line; at the defense perimeter of greater Budapest along the Danube and along the River Ipoly, however in the meanwhile another catastrophe was brewing about 120 kilometers south of Budapest.

<sup>49</sup> Gen. Maj. Zoltán Álgya-Pap was the 11<sup>th</sup> officer in time sequence to be awarded the Golden Medal of Valor for personal bravery.

<sup>50</sup> Ref: Darnóy: "*A Budapestért vívott harc*" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján, XX. pg. 230.

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Soviets could not have picked a better spot for their Danube crossing, even if they tried, than what they did. It is usually assumed that it was coincidence, although one should not have had underestimated the Soviet intelligence activity. The boundary between the areas controlled by “Army Group South” and “Army Group F” ran through the small town of Mohács, on the Danube near the mouth of the Dráva River across from the town of Baja. Furthermore, the situation was complicated by the fact that the two army groups were subordinated to two different German high commands, Army Group South to the OKH<sup>51</sup> While



**Hungarian field artillery**

Army Group F to the OKW<sup>52</sup> so within a few miles without any significant terrain changes there was a totally different chain of command that converged only in Berlin. From a practical point of view, of course this was utterly senseless, it would have made much more sense to assign this small segment of front line north of the River Dráva to Army Group South and use the River Dráva as the boundary. Army Group F, under General Weichs was concentrating all of its attention on its withdrawal from Serbia on the Balkan, and paid

very little attention to his extreme northern flank on about a 50 km. length. The defensive forces there were the “ad hoc” local Hungarian troops in several river observation posts. Consequently, the troops of the 57<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army successfully crossed the Danube on November 27<sup>th</sup> and formed a giant bridgehead by the town of Mohács. With this “lucky” crossing the Russians attained a tremendous strategic advantage that they were quick to exploit.

To further illustrate the unfortunate conditions at Mohács let us examine another Russian attempt to cross the Danube; approximately 60 km. north of Mohács at Dunaföldvár. Here in a very bloody struggle the Soviet attempt had been blocked for 10 days by the combat team of General Major László Kesseő.<sup>53</sup> Had there been a strong defensive position at Mohács, perhaps the Russian crossing could have been delayed there long enough for some reinforcements to arrive. Here at first, defenders formed a bridgehead position on the eastern bank of the river, around the village of Solt to secure the bridge for a possible counterattack, which they held for 10 days, in the face of the heavy attacks of two Soviet divisions. The 34<sup>th</sup> Russian Guard and the 40<sup>th</sup> Siberian Rifle Divisions, although the strength of the defenders was very modest compared to that of the Russians.

The defense consisted of the following units:<sup>54</sup>

- The “ad hoc” formed “*Solt*” Hungarian infantry regiment without any heavy weapons detachments except an antitank platoon.
- A German “*Volks grenadier*” Regiment
- A German SS Police Regiment of only 2 battalion strength
- The 105<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Antiaircraft Artillery Battalions deployed in antitank deployment. (The Hungarian “Boforsz” 80 mm. AA cannon was capable of firing armor piercing shells.)
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Field Artillery Battalion
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Combat Engineer Battalion (not at full strength)

<sup>51</sup> Ober Kommando (des) Heeres

<sup>52</sup> Ober Kommando Wehrmacht

<sup>53</sup> Gen. Major László Kesseő was originally the commanding officer of the Hungarian antiaircraft Artillery Brigade assembled in the area.

<sup>54</sup> Ref: Adonyi: *A Magyar Katona* . op.cit.

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

- The 105<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Artillery Battalion, as a rifle unit.

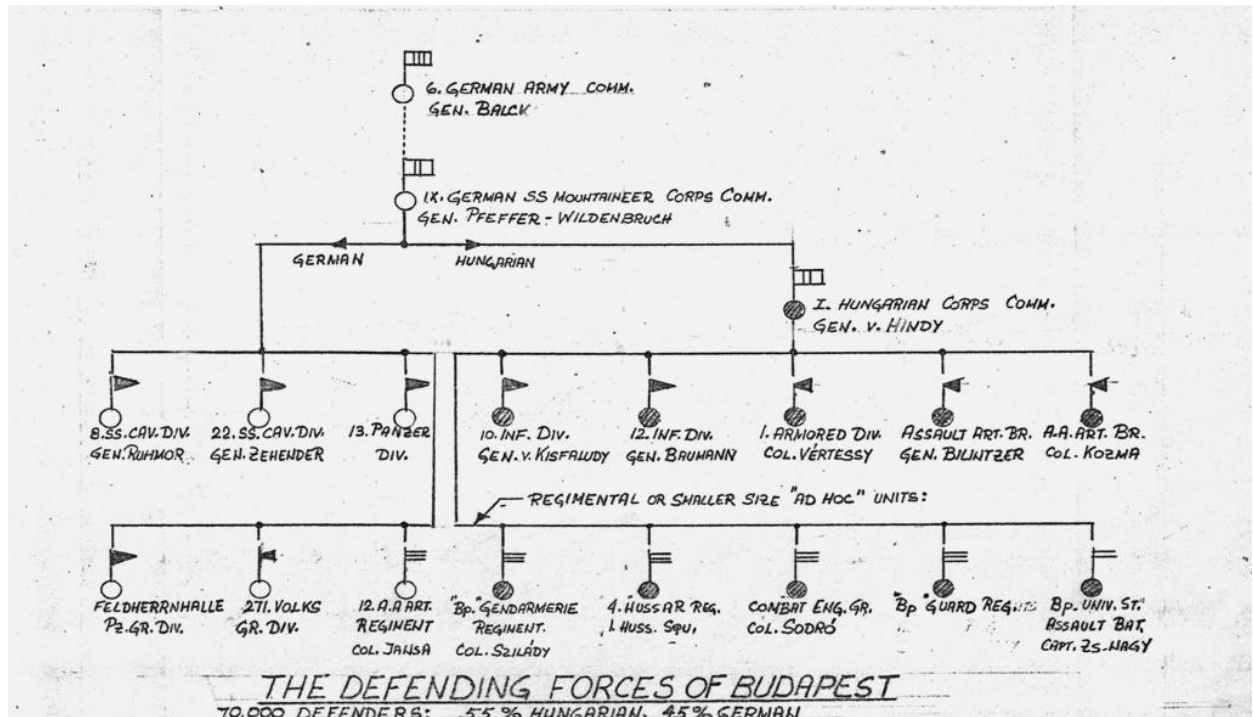
The combat strength of Gen. Kesseő's combat team was less than that of a single division and yet they performed their task successfully in the face of the much greater enemy force. During the course of the heavy fighting the following unit commanders showed extraordinary courage by leading their troops and giving their lives in close-combat with the enemy:

Company commanders First Lt. Nagy, Lt. Simon, Lt. Kossányi, Lt. Kovács, Ensign Kelemen, and A.A.. artillery battalion commander, Maj. Kövér.

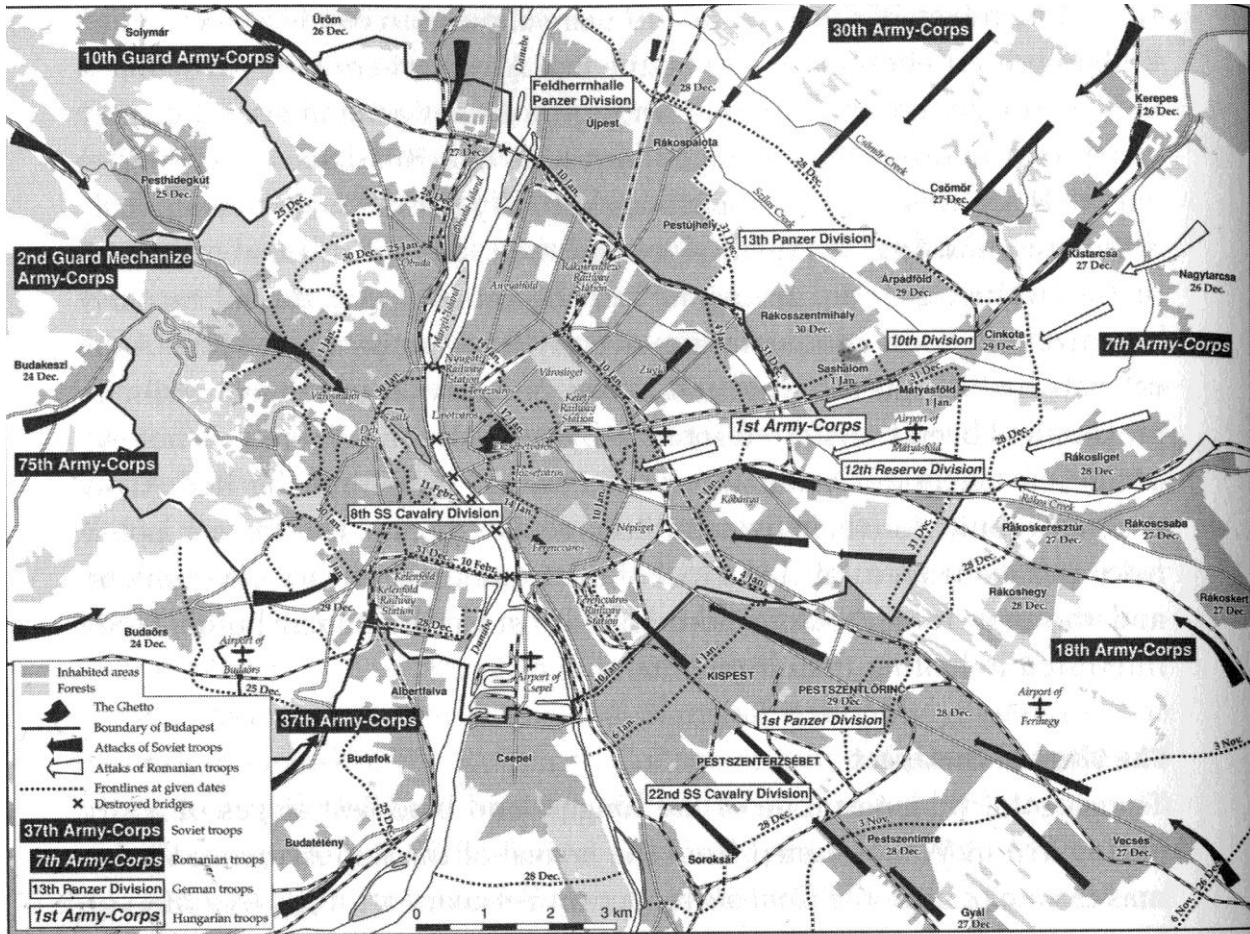
Unfortunately the bloody struggle at Solt-Dunaföldvár could not prevent the Russian invasion of Transdanubia, since on November 30<sup>th</sup> the troops of the 57<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army broke out of their bridgehead at Mohács, and moving west they took the city of Pécs (an important industrial center). Then in a northwesterly direction pushed on to Lake Balaton, and due north rolled up the scant defense from behind along the Danube, downstream from Budapest. By December 5<sup>th</sup> reached the southern outskirts of the capital on the western bank of the river. It was the Lake Balaton-Budapest line where their advance due north was checked by some of the quickly regrouped units. These were comprised of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army, the 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Infantry Divisions, some of the units of the Hussar Division and the Kesseő Group, along with some of the units of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> German Panzer Divisions and the 27<sup>th</sup> Volks Grenadier Divisions of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army. The Soviet advance due west, south of Lake Balaton was finally halted by the troops of the German XXII. and LXVIII Corps rushed there from the Balkans and from Italy under the command the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army.

The final responsibility for the quick Soviet advance must fall on the OKH that had completely overlooked the strategic importance of the Danube and neglected to build up an appreciable defense there. Had the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army sent there not as an afterthought after the fact, but as a preventive measure a month earlier, the situation would have been much different.

The main Russian pressure was still directed north, and they continued to push on the western side of the capital, where the battles were fought with heavy casualties and great ferocity on both sides. Finally 20 days after the appearance of the first Soviet tank on the western outskirts city, on Christmas Eve the Russians closed the ring around the unfortunate city.



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Map 5. Siege of Budapest, December 24, 1944–February 13, 1945.





In a last heroic effort the people of Budapest are raising barricades against the Soviet tanks.

### 3.2. The red pincers close.

In the winter of 1944, the Soviet political leadership was pressing for some spectacular military victories to gain an advantageous bargaining position with the Western Allies in the upcoming Yalta Conference. The swift capture of Budapest and Vienna would have served such purpose, especially at a time when the Western Allies were bogged down in the Ardennes. The Stavka poured in fresh reinforcements to Marshal Malinovsky's 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front and to Marshal Tolbukhin's 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front further to increase their numerical superiority to four to one. On the front line within the Carpathian Basin, there were 187 Soviet Divisions pressing against 32 German and 13 Hungarian divisions.<sup>55</sup>

Consequently Marshal Malinovsky committed not less than 20 divisions to the siege of Budapest, which was defended with an equivalent strength of 3 German, and 3 Hungarian divisions, consisting of approximately 70,000 defenders. (The Russian sources exaggerated this number after the siege, by reporting 49,000 killed and 110,000 captured "Germans".) The Soviet forces mounting the attack on the capital consisted of the strategic units:

On the north-east the XXX. Soviet Corps, on the east the VII. Romanian Corps, on the south-east the X. Guard Corps, on the south the XVIII. Independent Guard Corps. and on the west the XVIII. Soviet Tank Corps.<sup>56</sup>

The 70,000 defenders were under the commands of the I. Hungarian Corps Command of General Colonel vitéz Iván Hídy and of the IX. SS German Mountaneer Corps Command Ober-

<sup>55</sup> Darnóy: "*A Budapestért vívott harc*" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. 1968. Oct. pg. 8

<sup>56</sup> Darnóy: "*A Budapestért vívott harc*" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. 1968. Oct. pg. 10

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

*gruppenführer* (Lt. General) Karl von Pfeffer-Wildenbruch. 55% of all the defenders were Hungarians and 45% Germans. (Actually a large percentage of the German soldiers were so called “*Volksdeutsch*” or bilingual ethnic Germans living in southern Transylvania, Hungary and Yugoslavia, who had joined or were conscripted to the SS) Further statistical breakdown shows that Hungarians comprised 65% of all the field artillery and 85% of all the antiaircraft artillery (160 AAA pieces).<sup>57</sup> of the defense. Despite of the fact that the majority of the defenders were Hungarians unfortunately the German military leadership appointed the German Corps commander to be the overall commander of the defense of the Hungarian capital.(see the organization chart of “The Defending Forces of Budapest”).

After the fall of the city of Székesfehérvár,<sup>58</sup> the swift Russian advance and the encirclement of the capital on Christmas Eve from the west had caught the defense by surprise. The red pincers closed so quickly around the city that many frantic Christmas shoppers who had left unsuspecting earlier during the day from the western suburbs could not return to their homes by that evening. The Russians armored vanguards were already advancing toward the center of the city from the south west, when a quickly organized Hungarian task force was thrown in battle to stop them. The Budapest Guard Battalion and one of the Gendarmerie Battalions supported by 7 assault guns of the “*Billnitzer*” artillery group counter attacked. under the command of Lt. Col. Veresváry. In the daring counterattack the Russians were not only stopped, but were thrown back and the important railroad yard at Kelenföld was recaptured. On the next day the defensive perimeter of Buda (the city on the western bank of the River Danube) was hastily established by relocating the 8<sup>th</sup> German SS Cavalry Division and some of the Hungarian Gendarmerie units there.

After the initial impact the Russians shifted their main pressure to the east and were bearing down more heavily on the defenders of Pest, (the city on the eastern bank of the Danube) with concentric attacks toward the center of the city.

The troops and the minimal needs of the population was supposed to be supplied by an air lift from the airfield at Pápa. (Pápa is a town 110 km. west of Budapest.) Army Group South headquarters estimated 60 tons of ammunition and other supplies had to be flown in daily with another 20 tons of material airdropped.<sup>59</sup> The returning planes were supposed to carry out the wounded. It was soon evident that the air lift could not meet the required minimal needs and the difficulties were compounded even further when on January 5<sup>th</sup> the temporary air strip was lost in Pest. The Hungarian troops for the most part suffered the worst of it since the entire air lift operation and distribution of the received material was exclusively under German control. The German cooperation left much to be desired, which was evidenced by General Hindy's report of December 30.<sup>60</sup>

*“I must report that nearly all Hungarian field commanders have requested me to assume the tactical command over them. The Hungarian troops feel abandoned.”*

(E.g. when under German commands.) (General Hindy was administrative commander of all the Hungarian troops within the besieged city, however many Hungarian units had been tactically subordinated to German commands.)

Most of the defenders were running short on food, fuel, ammunition, medical supplies and even drinking water. They were fighting on gallantly in a bitter struggle for every foot of ground for every building and sometimes for every room in a house. Both, the Hungarian and German defenders, and the Russians averaged 1000 dead daily in the ferocious combat, but as the strength of the defenders was dwindling away, the Russians slowly kept gaining ground toward the center of the city. The streets of Budapest were nothing but rubble and the civilian population was trying to find

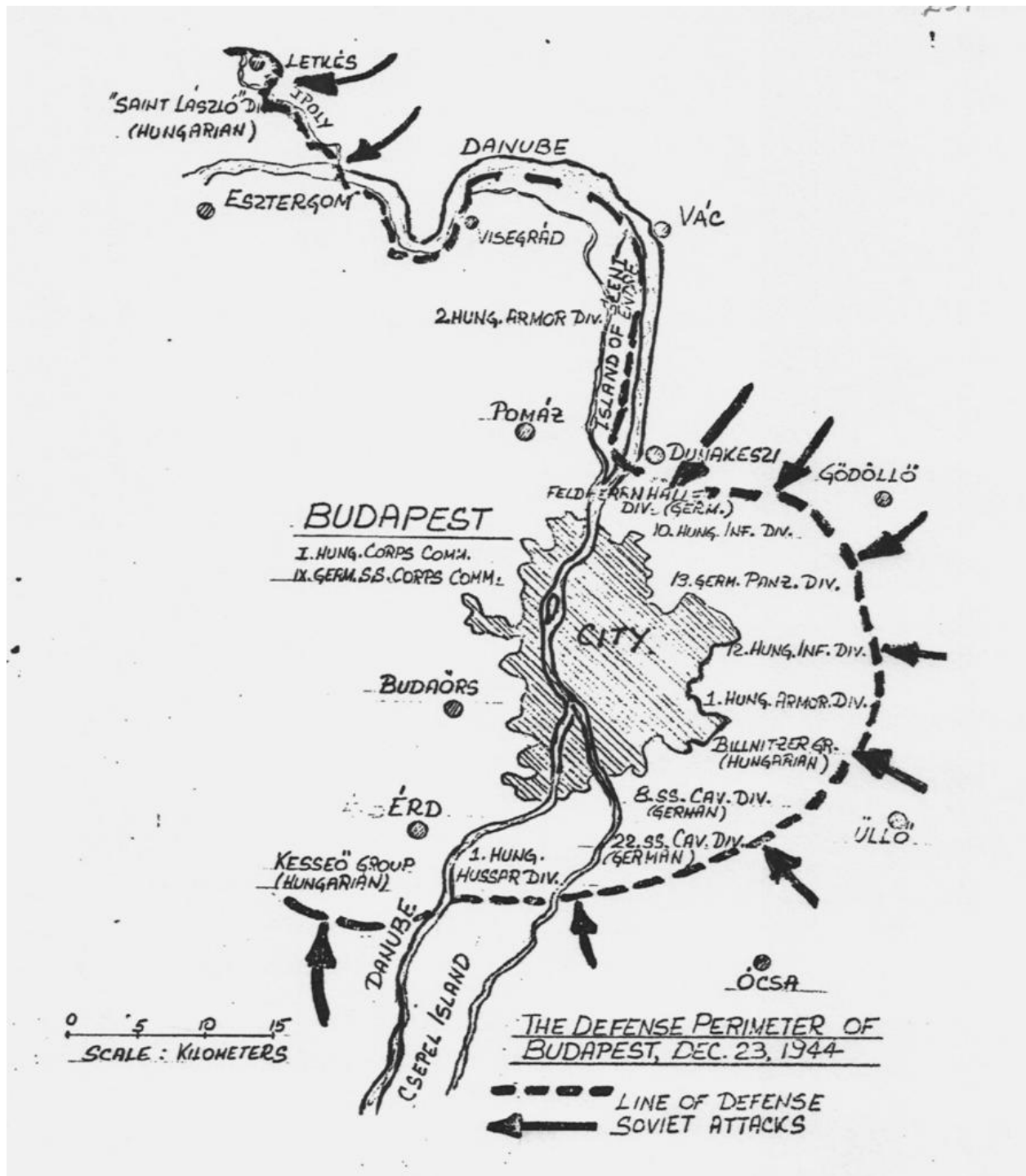
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<sup>57</sup> Adonyi: “*A magyar katona...*” op.cit. pg. 170 .

<sup>58</sup> Székesfehérvár a city, 60 km. (37 miles) south-west of Budapest fell on December 23rd after some very heavy fighting.

<sup>59</sup> Ref: Darnóy: “*A Budapestért vívott harc*” (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. Feb. 1970. pg. 8

<sup>60</sup> Ref: Darnóy: “*A Budapestért vívott harc*” (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. Feb. 1970. pg. 9



refuge in the darkness of the cellars suffering from cold, hunger and thirst. The Soviet planes and troops indiscriminately gunned down civilians out on the streets. When advancing, the Soviet troops frequently forced groups of civilians to walk in front of them to compel the defenders not to open fire, and persuade the Hungarian soldiers to surrender, as it was reported by radio message (1064/I) of the I. Hungarian Corps Headquarters on Jan. 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>61</sup> Despite the horrible conditions, the defenders hung on in the hope that relief would be on its way soon.

<sup>61</sup> Ref Adonyi: "A magyar katona..." ... pg. 173 op. cit.

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL



**The utter and savage devastation of a once beautiful city,  
Budapest.**



### 3.3. The relief attempts to free Budapest.

The relief of Budapest was not an empty propaganda hoax but a very serious decision on the part of the German High Command. Hitler as well as the Russians had recognized the political implications of the loss of Budapest and he was determined to save it. At that time however there were no appreciable reserves available on the Eastern Front, since most of the German elite panzer divisions were tied up on the Western Front in the Ardennes. (In the Battle of the Bulge.) The only available reserve on the entire Eastern Front was General Gille's IV. SS Panzer Corps near Warsaw, under the command of General Reinhardt's Army Group Center. Overriding the strong objections of General Guderian, the chief of the O.K.H, Hitler ordered the transfer of this Corps to Army Group South, to Hungary to accomplish the relief of Budapest. Gille relentlessly pressed his panzers and at one point they came within 12 miles of the city, but his exhausted troops were unable to break the siege.



**SS Obergruppenführer  
Herbert Gille, commander of  
the IV. SS Panzer Corps**

The entire relief force was commanded by the IV. SS Panzer Corps command. The spearhead consisted of the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, "Wiking" and "Totenkopf" German Panzer Divisions, and the German "Feldherrnhalle" Panzer Grenadier Division. The second wave was comprised of the 711<sup>th</sup>. German Infantry Division, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division, and the 271<sup>st</sup> (German Volksgrenadier Division expended by the 42<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Infantry Regiment.

To preserve the element of surprise the attack begun without an artillery barrage, on Jan. 1. 1945 at 10:30 P.M. The spirited attack caught the Soviet forces by surprise and swiftly broke through the lines of the XXXI. Soviet Guard Corps. By January 4<sup>th</sup> the vanguards of the relief force had reached the town of Bicske (a town 25 km from Budapest), and up to that time they had captured or destroyed 79 Soviet tanks, 160 artillery pieces and 107 antitank guns. <sup>62\*</sup>

After the element of surprise wore off however, Marshal Tolbukhin of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front was. quick to recognize the intent of the counterattack and swiftly relocated the II. Soviet Mechanized Corps, the XVIII. Soviet Tank Corps, and the VII. Soviet Mechanized Corps to stop the- advance. Consequently by January 6<sup>th</sup> the advance had bogged down, with the exception of the left flank where the relief force recaptured the city of Esztergom . By late that evening however, the initiative slipped to the superior Russian forces, and despite the initial success the relief force did not succeed in breaking through to the encircled city.

After the abortive offensive in the Ardennes the German military leadership finally decided to strengthen the Eastern Front and gave up the idea of trying to convince the Western Allies of a separate armistice. The German High Command decided to transfer four panzer divisions to Hungary under the 6<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army Command of General Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich, to relieve Budapest.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Infantry Divisions were added to the relief force. The element of surprise was hoped to be served by the fact that the initial direction of the attack was not true east toward Budapest, but south east towards the Danube, downstream from the city.

The attack began on January 18<sup>th</sup>, with even greater initial success than the first one. The relief force quickly retook the city of Székesfehérvár than by January 20<sup>th</sup> the German panzers reached the Danube by Dunapentele.

The Hungarian infantry divisions retook the towns of Siófok, Ozora and Simontornya. The Russians, however, quickly counterattacked with large mechanized and tank forces and the second attempt had been bogged down to a stalemate also.

The confident Soviet attitude was well reflected in an Intercepted Russian radio message:

<sup>62</sup> Ref: Darnóy: "A Budapestért vívott harc" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. July-Aug. 1970 pg. 6



### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

*"With these means they will not accomplish anything. The wall of our troops and the eat number of our weapons are awaiting for them."* <sup>63</sup>

General Guderian <sup>64</sup> who was much disappointed about the failure of the relief attempts put the blame on the field commanders and on the troops by stating that these commanders and troops were not of the 1940 quality anymore.<sup>65</sup> Undoubtedly General Guderian was right, but he had forgotten that the conditions were not of those in 1940 either and the main reason for failure was the lack of adequate forces and the overpowering stiff enemy opposition.



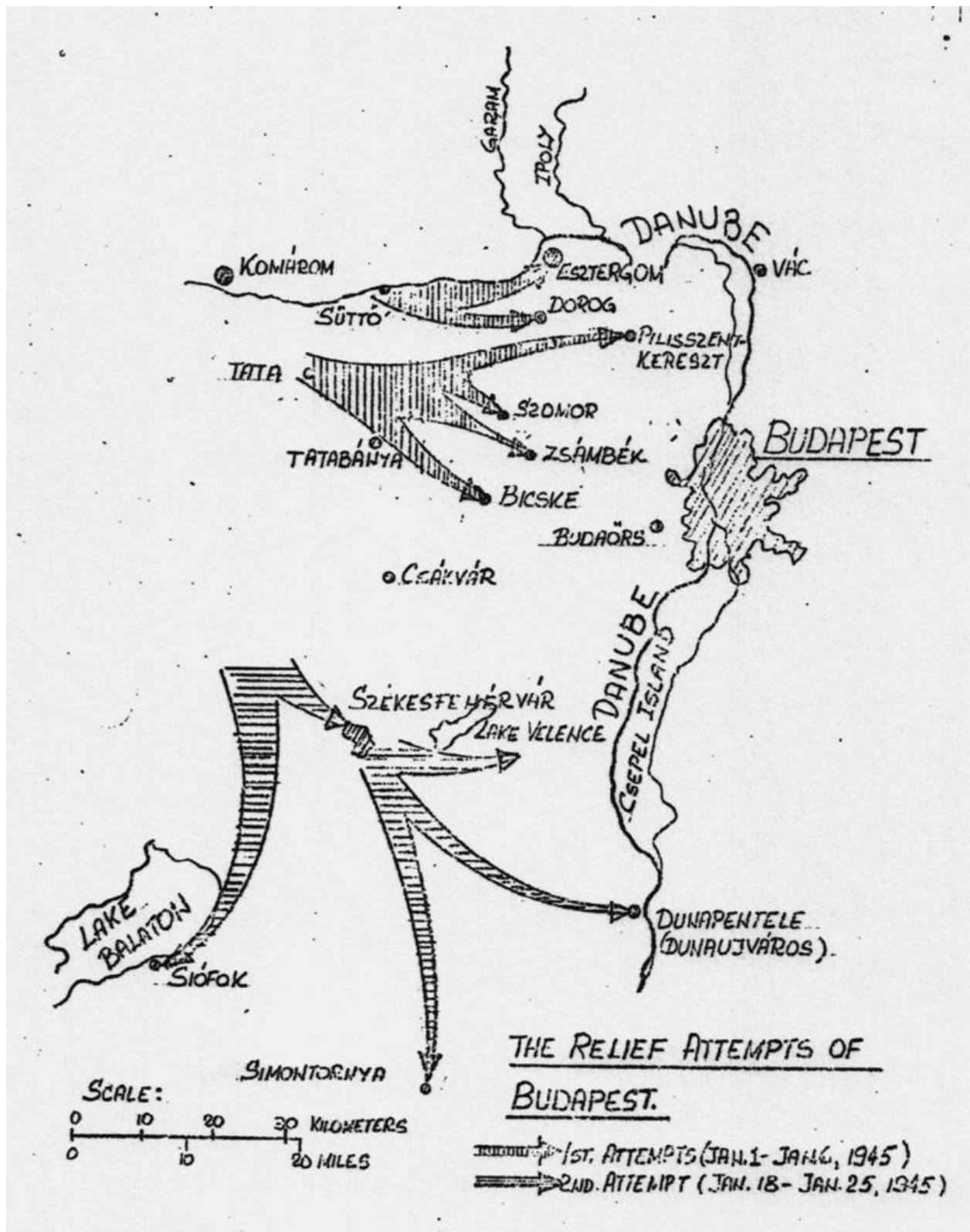
**Budapest after the siege. The totally ruined and burned out Royal Castle in the background.**

<sup>63</sup> Ref. Adonyi: "*A magyar katona.....*" pg. 82. op. cit.

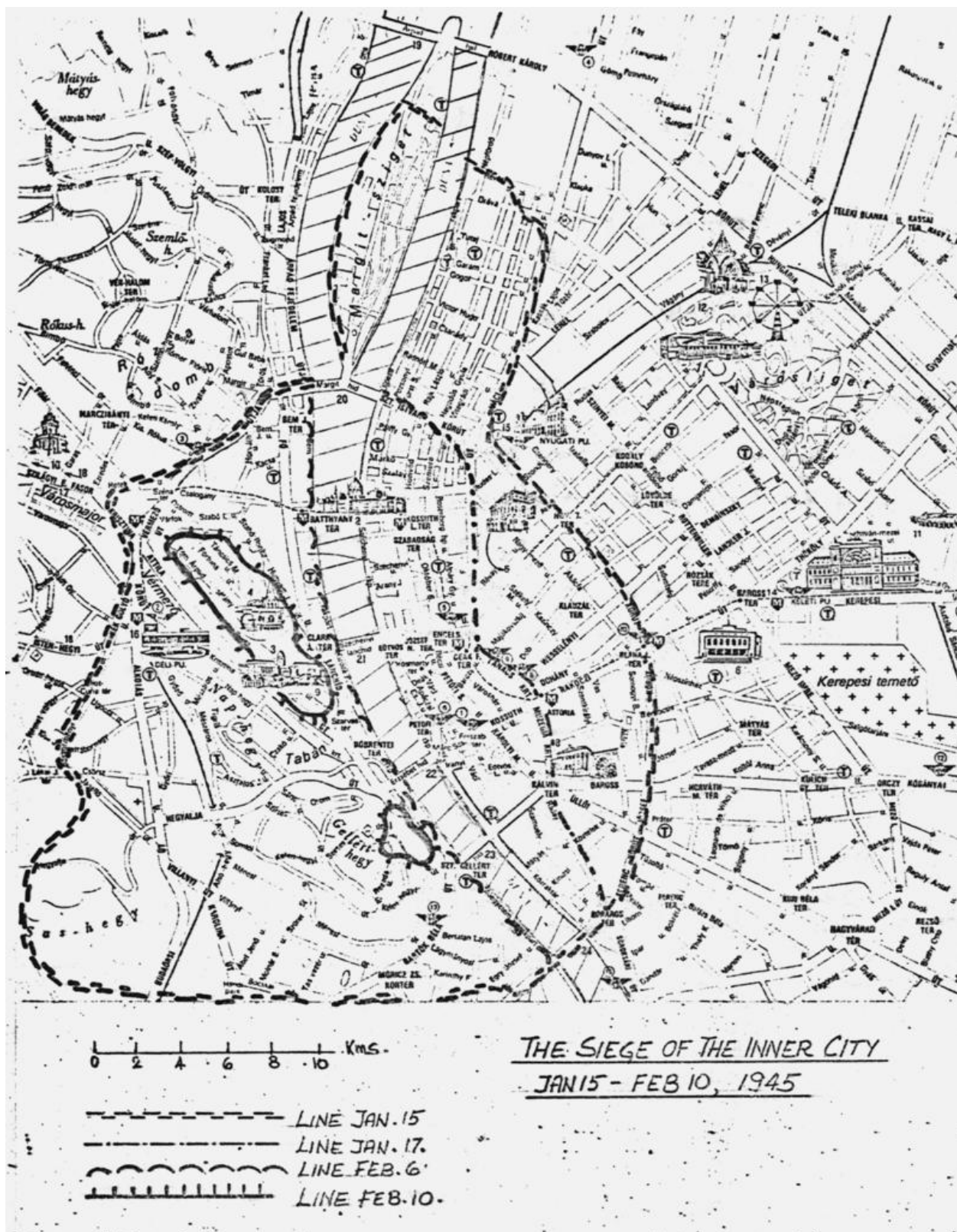
<sup>64</sup> General Heinz Guderian Chief of the German Supreme Command, O.K.H.

<sup>65</sup> Ref. Guderian: *Panzer Leader*. pg. 386 E.P. Dutton & Co. 1952, New York.





# PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL





### 3.4. GLORIA VICTIS

With the failure of the relief attempts the Soviets tightened the pressure on the besieged city of Budapest. On January 18<sup>th</sup> the defenders were forced to give up Pest and withdrew to the western bank of the Danube. The German engineers blew up five of the seven bridges spanning the Danube that day, despite the objections of the Hungarian command.<sup>66</sup> General Hindy's objection was totally valid since the Russians had been on the western bank of the Danube since Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> anyway, and by that time they had constructed several military bridges including one with a 60 ton capacity. Among the bridges blown up was the Chain Bridge, which was a historical landmark and was designed by the famed English engineer Adam Tierney Clark in 1832, and at the time of its construction it was the longest suspension bridge in Europe.

The battle in Buda continued even with greater ferocity, if possible. In the meanwhile the defenders hardly had any supplies at all, and the hospitals and aid stations were overflowing with the wounded. The Hungarian Corps Command on Feb. 5<sup>th</sup> described the situation as follows in its report:

*"The daily ration is one slice of bread and one chunk of horse-meat All activity is difficult due to the physical weakness, and yet the men are fighting relentlessly and obediently in the hope of the 6 weeks relief."*<sup>67</sup>

Also on February 5<sup>th</sup>, Lt. Field Marshal Hindy was promoted to General Colonel, Chief of Operations Lt. Col. Horváth to colonel, and General Major Billnitzer the commander of the elite Billnitzer Hungarian Assault Artillery Group to Lt. Field Marshal, in recognition of the courage of their troops.

By February 9<sup>th</sup> the defenders had been pushed back to two strong-holds; to the Royal Palace, and to the Citadel (Citadella) Fort. On Feb. 11<sup>th</sup> the Citadel fell after being heroically defended by the A.A. Artillery units of Col. József Kozma. Late that day General Pfeffer-Wildenbruch informed Gen. Hindy of his plan of a breakout at dawn. General Hindy's impression was that the reason why he was given such a short notice was the fact that there would not be enough time to alert all the Hungarian troops and these units by default would be sacrificed for the cover of the breakout.<sup>68</sup>

On February 11<sup>th</sup> General Pfeffer-Wildenbruch sent his last radio message to the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army Headquarters:

*"Die Verpflegung ist verbraucht, die letzte Patrone im Lauf." All the food supplies are exhausted, the last bullet is in the chamber. We must choose between a surrender, or a massacre without a fight. With the last able German, "Honvéd"<sup>69</sup> and Arrow-cross units I shall attack to establish a new base for combat. I shall break out at dusk on Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>. I request contact between Szomor and Kirva. If contact is impossible there I shall advance to the Pilis Mountains. I request contact there in the area of Pilisszentkereszt.*<sup>70</sup>

The first wave began the attack at dawn on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>. The vanguard consisted of a German unit commanded by Col. Dorner, supported by the few remaining assault guns under First. Lt. Landauer. The right flank was secured by a 500 men Hungarian force of the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, commanded by Capt. Sónyi.

<sup>66</sup> One of the bridges was blown up accidentally earlier and another had been destroyed by allied bombing.

<sup>67</sup> Ref. Adonyi: "*A magyar katona.....*" pg. 174 op.cit.

<sup>68</sup> Ref. Darnóy: "*A Budapestért vívott harc*" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján Nov. 1972. Pg. 9

<sup>69</sup> *Honvéd* troops; Regular Hungarian Army units.

<sup>70</sup> Ref: Darnóy: "*A Budapestért vívott harc*" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. 1972 Nov. pg. 9.

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL



**Capt. Zsombor  
kézdivásárhelyi Nagy.**

German and Hungarian units alternated in the order. The rear guard was supposed to be the Hungarian Budapest Guard Battalion. During the break out both Generals, Hindy and von Pfeffer-Wilenbruch were captured. Most of the troops quickly perished under the deadly Soviet fire barrage. According to the German reports; 611 German soldiers , 465 wounded and 267 Hungarian soldiers, 227 wounded, managed to reach safety, the Hungarians reported 77 Hungarian soldiers reaching their lines.<sup>71</sup> Lt. Field Marshal Billnitzer leading a small group, was also taken prisoner around 11 o'clock that evening.<sup>72</sup> The largest coherent group was that of Col. Wolff, which succeeded getting through by Zsámbék.

This was the last radio message sent out by Captain András Csapó of the defenders on Feb. 13:

*'Fellow Gendarmes!*

*We are completely surrounded in the ruins of the Royal Palace. We have not had any bread or water for days. We are prepared to lay down our lives and trust our fate to Almighty God, if we do not live through this inferno, take care of our families. "God save the Hungarian!"*<sup>73</sup> *Long live Hungary! Long live the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie!"*<sup>74</sup>

One of the many fallen heroes was Capt. Zsombor kézdivásárhelyi Nagy. Leading the attack of the University Students Assault Battalion he fell on Feb. 14, not far from the Hungarian-German lines.<sup>75</sup>

The Hungarian units that fought through the siege:

- 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Colonel Sándor András.)
- 12<sup>th</sup>. Infantry Division
- Some units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division
- The Billnitzer Assault Artillery Group (Lt. Field Marshal Ernő Billnitzer.)
- The Budapest Anti Aircraft Artillery Brigade (Colonel Kozma)
- The Budapest Gendarmerie Regiment (Colonel Gyula Szilády.)
- Some units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussar Regiment
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Hussar Squadron.
- The Budapest Combat Engineers Group.
- The Budapest Guard Battalion. (Major László Vannay)
- The Budapest University Students Assault Battalion. (Last C.O. Capt. Zsombor kézdivásárhelyi Nagy)

The German units that fought through the siege:

- 8<sup>th</sup> SS Cavalry Division.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> SS Cavalry Division.
- 13<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division
- The "Feldherrnhalle" Panzer Grenadier Division.
- 271<sup>st</sup> "Volks Grenadier" Division.
- 12<sup>th</sup> Anti Aircraft Artillery Regiment.

<sup>71</sup> Ref Berecky; „Amerikai Magyar Élet“, 1998 feb. 15, pg 10

<sup>72</sup> Ref. Ungváry: "Budapest Ostroma", Faktum -Corvina, 1998 pg 184.

<sup>73</sup> First line of the Hungarian National Anthem.

<sup>74</sup> Ref. Rektor: "A Magyar Királyi Csendőrség Oknyomozó Története". Árpád Pub. 1980 Pg. 284 also Hadak Útján 1999 , Jan.-Feb. pg. 3

<sup>75</sup> Ref. Kövendy: A Magyar Királyi Csendőrség, Sovereign Press. 1973 pg. 278

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL



**Corpses and body fragments covered the route of the breakout, as if they were a carpet.**

(Hungarians, Authors note.) It is quite perplexing why the Soviets exaggerated number of the POW's to such high number, when there were actually only 70,000 defenders and where did the additional 89,000 "German soldiers" come from?

The Soviet reasoning can be rationalized as follows: The Russian political leadership wanted to show some spectacular military victories before the Yalta Conference to impress the Western Allies in order to gain a favorable bargaining position at the time when the Western Allies had been bogged down on the Western Front.

The capture of Budapest would have served such a purpose, consequently the Stavka<sup>77</sup> allowed Marshal Malinovsky two weeks to take the city, but the defenders held it for 52 days and the fall of the city passed the expiration of the Yalta Conference by two days.

To justify the slow progress Malinovsky's command had to exaggerate the size of the defending force. Their report of 49,000 killed enemy soldiers was an inflated estimate, the 110,000 captured Germans is also greatly exaggerated. To make up the 110,000 captured "Germans" they rounded up



**Long lines of Hungarian POWs being marched away. One out of three never returned.**



**Tragedy of the siege**

an Soldiers were killed and equal numbers wounded.<sup>78</sup>

The Soviet victory at Budapest was celebrated by a 24-gun salute of 324 artillery pieces at Moscow. (No ammunition shortage there. ) The XVIII. "Stanislaw" Independent Guard Corps received the "Order of The Red Flag" for their part in the siege of Budapest. On January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the Soviet Presidium constituted a memorial medal for all those Soviet troops who had participated in the siege, with the inscription; "*For the Capture of Budapest*".

After the siege, the Soviet military sources reported 49,000 killed and 110,000 captured German soldiers.<sup>76</sup> (No specific mention of the Hun-

many unsuspecting civilians from the streets. (There are only fragmentary reports of the number of civilians deported to the Soviet Union. Author's note.) For a long time the military casualties of the Red Army were confidential, however after the collapse of the Soviet Union this information was declassified, accordingly during the siege 71,950 Soviet soldiers were killed, 240,00 were wounded, and 32,00 have disappeared.

The German sources indicate, that 17,200 German soldiers died, and 8,000 were wounded, the remaining Hungarian reports are fragmentary, but according to the best estimates 9,000 Hungari-

<sup>76</sup> Ref. Darnóy: "*A Budapestért vívott harc*" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. 1972 Nov. pg. 10

<sup>77</sup> Stavka, the Soviet Military High Command.

<sup>78</sup> Ref Berecky L.: „*Az 1945-ös Budai Kitörés Emlékére*”. Amerikai Kanadai Magyar Élet, 1998 Feb. 15 Pg. 10



### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

At the Yalta Conference regardless of the battle of Budapest, the Western Allies made many concessions to the Soviet Union for the promise that Russia Would declare war on Japan. These concessions resulted in nearly a half of a century Communist domination in Eastern Europe.

*The Soviet Union declared war on Japan, August 8, 1945, two days after the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.*



Contemporary poster: "Do you want to get to Siberia too? NEVER! Then fight and work for victory!"

79



A 1997 poster honoring the defenders of the breakout attempt

<sup>79</sup> Ref: Hadak Útján, Op.Cit. March-April 1997

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL



Hungarian field artillery in action

#### **4. BLOOD FOR EVERY INCH OF LAND.**

- 4.1 Brief story of the Szent László Division.
- 4.2 Operation “Spring Awakening”.
- 4.3 The Status of the Hungarian Forces in the spring of 1945.
- 4.4 The Soviet thrust into Western Hungary.
- 4.5 “Between two pagans for one country does he shed his blood”.



Insignia of the Division

#### 4.1 Brief story of the Szent László Division.

In the face of insurmountable Soviet onslaught toward the heart of Hungary, the Hungarian government in a desperate attempt had ordered the organization of this division. On October 12, 1944, the Minister of Defense General-Colonel Csatai issued the following orders:

*"In the life-death struggle of our country against Soviet Bolshevism, from the best of all remaining available troops I hereby order the organization of a new elite division, the "Szent László" Division"*

For the first time, during the Second World War, a division was given the privilege of receiving a name rather than a number for its designation. Furthermore, the namesake of the division, Szent (Saint) László, occupies a very special place in Hungarian history, and next to Saint Stephen he is the most revered of all the canonized saints of Hungary. Szent László (1077 - 1095) is considered to be one of the greatest Hungarian knight-kings. From Transylvania to Transdanubia there are numerous folk legends throughout Hungary about his deeds.



Gen. V. Zoltán Szügyi

The Hungarian army's senior paratrooper officer, General-Major vitéz Zoltán Szügyi was appointed to be the commander of the division. Gen. Szügyi was a highly decorated line officer, who as a young enlisted ensign during World War I had been decorated with the "Golden Medal of Valor". He took over the paratrooper unit from Lt. Col. Árpád Bertalan after his accidental death. During the great Russian breakthrough at the Don in the winter of 1943, as an infantry unit commander he has distinguished himself again in the defense of Novy-Oskol. Gen. Szügyi was given the privilege of picking his own staff of officers of impeccable record;

Colonel Márton Ferenczy, infantry commander, Lt. Col. Árpád Szörényi, deputy infantry commander, Colonel Vilmos Dárdai artillery commander, Lt. Colonel Victor Falk deputy artillery commander, Major Árpád Lajtós, chief of operations, Captain Jenő Rutkay deputy chief of operations.

The nucleus of the division became Gen. Szügyi's own paratrooper unit. As a battalion under the command of Major Pokornyi this unit already distinguished itself in the northeastern Carpathians in the summer of 1944. Then, the battalion took part in the defense of Budapest, at Soroksár with such bravery that most of the members received very high decorations, including Major Pokornyi, who was awarded the "Golden Medal of Valor". In the fall of 1944, the Battalion had been expanded to a two battalion regiment, with Maj. Pokornyi assuming command Captain Tassonyi commanding the first and Captain Ugron commanding the second battalion. Later the second battalion was taken over by Captain Sanna. The young second battalion took part in the de-

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

fense of Budapest around Csepel and Fót and its members among a large number of other decorations earned 31 iron crosses in less than two weeks. The battalion even obtained the dubious honor of being mentioned by the Hungarian language short wave propaganda broadcast of Radio Moscow as the "Battle-ax Desperados". (Referring to the Division insignia.)

The Air Force Rifle Regiment commanded by Colonel Heinrici formed the second infantry regiment of the division. This unit was formed by the supernumerary support personnel of the Air Force in an effort to provide much needed infantry unit to the front lines. The unit retained the Esprit de Corps and identity of the Air Force and indeed, it was a fine body of men who were proud of themselves.

The third infantry regiment of the division was the First Grenadier Regiment commanded by Lt. Col. Stefán. This regiment was originally formed from Regent Horthy's own body guard unit.



Paratroopers on the march

The First Battalion was commanded by the very able Captain Pálfi, proved to be an excellent fighting unit, but the Second Battalion under Captain Békássy fell short of expectations.

All of the artillery units served with distinction on the field previously: the 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 76<sup>th</sup>, Field Artillery Battalions, the VIII. Mechanized Artillery Battalion, the 20<sup>th</sup> Assault Artillery Battalion, which was equipped with German made "Panzer Wasp" assault guns, and the 24/1 and 16/1 Assault Artillery Batteries equipped also with German made "Hetzer Tank Destroyers".

Especially the 1<sup>st</sup> Heavy Mortar Battalion commanded by Maj. Rapaich had distinguished itself by repelling three Soviet armor attacks in close combat by the village of Tápíósáp, while supporting the German "Feldherrnhalle" Division. In his report, the German artillery commander gave tribute to this unit the following manner.

*"... They gave an excellent example of bravery by defending their guns, ammunition and material in close combat with the enemy despite of the very difficult situation."*<sup>80</sup>

The division was assembling in the vicinity of Pápa and had to be combat ready by Dec. 10. to be deployed in the front sector of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army. The rapidly changing situation however altered plans and the division was alerted on Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>, and after two changes of orders was rushed to the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army sector on the northern bank of the Danube at the mouth of the Ipoly (Iper) River. Here the mechanized and armor units of the 7<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guard Army and the "Pljeve Group" were quickly gaining ground toward the Ipoly threatening to outflank and cut off the retreat route of the LVII. German Panzer Corps. further north still on the eastern bank of the river. The objective of the division was to form a bridgehead position around the village of Letkés on the eastern bank of the Ipoly and then secure the withdrawal of the German panzer Corps across the Ipoly and Garam (Hron) Rivers as the rearguard unit. The new line of defense was to be built up along the Garam River.

<sup>80</sup>Ref. Adonyi: "A Magyar Katona..." op. cit. pg. 177.

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

The first unit of the division to arrive by truck transport was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Paratrooper Battalion. As the truck convoy was approaching the Russians were already on the bridge over the Ipoly. As the paratroopers were jumping off their trucks Capt. Sanna immediately led an assault. The quick surprise attack not only cleared the bridge of the Russians, but the paratroopers were able to establish a bridgehead on the eastern bank as well. In their quick assault they captured 180 enemy soldiers, 176 machine and sub-machine guns, 22 mortars, 4 cannons, and a T-34 tank.<sup>81</sup> During the course of the next few days the rest of the division arrived and the defense along the Ipoly had been established. The paratroopers were relieved from the bridgehead by the First Battalion of the Air Force Rifle Regiment commanded by Capt. Pályi which with the support of the 24/1 and 16/1 Assault Artillery Batteries commanded by Maj. Bernolák managed to further expand the bridgehead, despite of the increasing enemy pressure and taking another 120 prisoners.



A young paratrooper

South of Letkés at the mouth of the Ipoly the Russians crossed the river also and took the village of Helemba. Here the attack of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the grenadiers, supported either by the 16/1 Assault Artillery Battery, or by the 6<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Artillery Battalion swiftly threw the Russians back across the river and retook the village. At the same time the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Grenadiers cleared up the Russian infiltrators along the river. By Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> two days after its arrival the Szent László Division was in firm control along the Ipoly.

On Dec. 26<sup>th</sup> however the Russians renewed their attack and overran the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grenadier Battalion at Helemba, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Paratrooper Battalion rushed there stopped the Russian advance in a bloody hand to hand combat. Unfortunately, the Russians managed to capture the regimental command post of the grenadiers there, including Lt. Col. Stefán.

At Letkés, attacks and counterattacks alternated almost by the hour inflicting heavy casualties on both sides, but the airmen held the bridgehead firmly at the Garam. In the meanwhile, the units of the VII. German Panzer Corps; the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> Panzer Divisions were retreating from the north across the River Garam, and they completed their crossings by December 27<sup>th</sup>. On that day the LXXII. German Corps Commander, Gen. Kirchner gave orders to the Szent László Division to withdraw. The withdrawal proceeded under the close cover of the 20<sup>th</sup> Assault Artillery Battalion commanded by Major. Henkey, and with the fire support of the field artillery battalions relocated on the western bank.

Most of the units of the division crossed the Garam by the bridge at Kőhídyarmat, held by the 1<sup>st</sup> Grenadier Battalion. On the northern flank however, the Air force Rifle Regiment was advancing toward the bridge at Kicsind and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Paratrooper Battalion toward the bridge at Kéménd. Both bridges had been blown up prematurely by the Germans. In the meanwhile the quickly advancing Russians had encircled both units. The Air force Rifle Regiment suffered very heavy casualties in crossing the icy river. Among the killed in action were regimental commander Col. Heinrich and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion commander, Capt. Freyler. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Paratrooper Battalion practically perished in a "fight to the finish" stand. Of the 800 man battalion not more than 50 had made it across the river.

The division took new defensive positions along the Garam. It held these positions until Jan, 7<sup>th</sup>, when its remnant were relieved and returned to Pápa to be reorganized. The German panzer units were regrouped across the Danube, in the vicinity of Tata, for the relief attack of Budapest. The Szent László Division with its courageous stand secured the withdrawal of more than 1400 vehicles, tanks and artillery pieces across River Garam..

<sup>81</sup>Ref Darnóy: "*A Budapestért vívott harc*" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. March 1963, Pg. 10.



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The German army's official journal the "Wermachtsbericht" on Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>, accounted for the action of the Szent László Division in the following manner:

*"Im Kampfgebiet der Donau hat die junge ungarische Division Szent László hervorragenden Kampfsgeist in Angriff und Abwehr bewiesen. Sie fügten dem stark überlegenen Feind hohe Verluste zu und hielten ihre Stellungen ohne einen Fussbreiten Boden zu verlieren."*<sup>82</sup> (On the Danube battleground the young Hungarian Szent



Gen. Szügyi and his staff

László Division displayed outstanding fighting spirit, both in attack and in defense. By that, it caused heavy casualties to the superior enemy forces and kept its positions unshakably without giving up an inch of ground.)

Large number of decorations were awarded to the members of the division, Gen. Szügyi who had displayed exemplary personal courage along with the other senior officers, had been awarded the German Knight's Cross by the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army commander, Gen. Col. Balck himself. (Who would have thought then, that a few month later, this very same Gen. Balck would falsely accuse the Szent

László Division of defecting to the enemy and issue his "infamous" orders.)

The Hungarian Military Journal (*Honvédségi Közlöny*) in its January issue of 1945 gave credit in the following manner:

*"In its heavy battles along the Ipoly and Garam, the Szent László Division raised high again the banner of the Hungarian Military Honor."*<sup>83</sup>

The heroic stand and sacrifice of the Szent László Division, certainly was of great tactical and even strategic importance at the time. However the historian must ask if this was really the psychological driving force that made those men fight so bravely. The truthful answer must of course be NO, since most of the men were not even aware of the tactical importance of their stand. The simple truth is, that these men fought and died with the same attitude than those who died in the Carpathians, at Torda, or at Budapest; simply in the defense of their homeland, with the instinct that turned them into the heroes they became.

After the "Battle of Ipoly", the division was reorganized and went on fighting till the very end of the war defending the last inch of Hungarian soil.

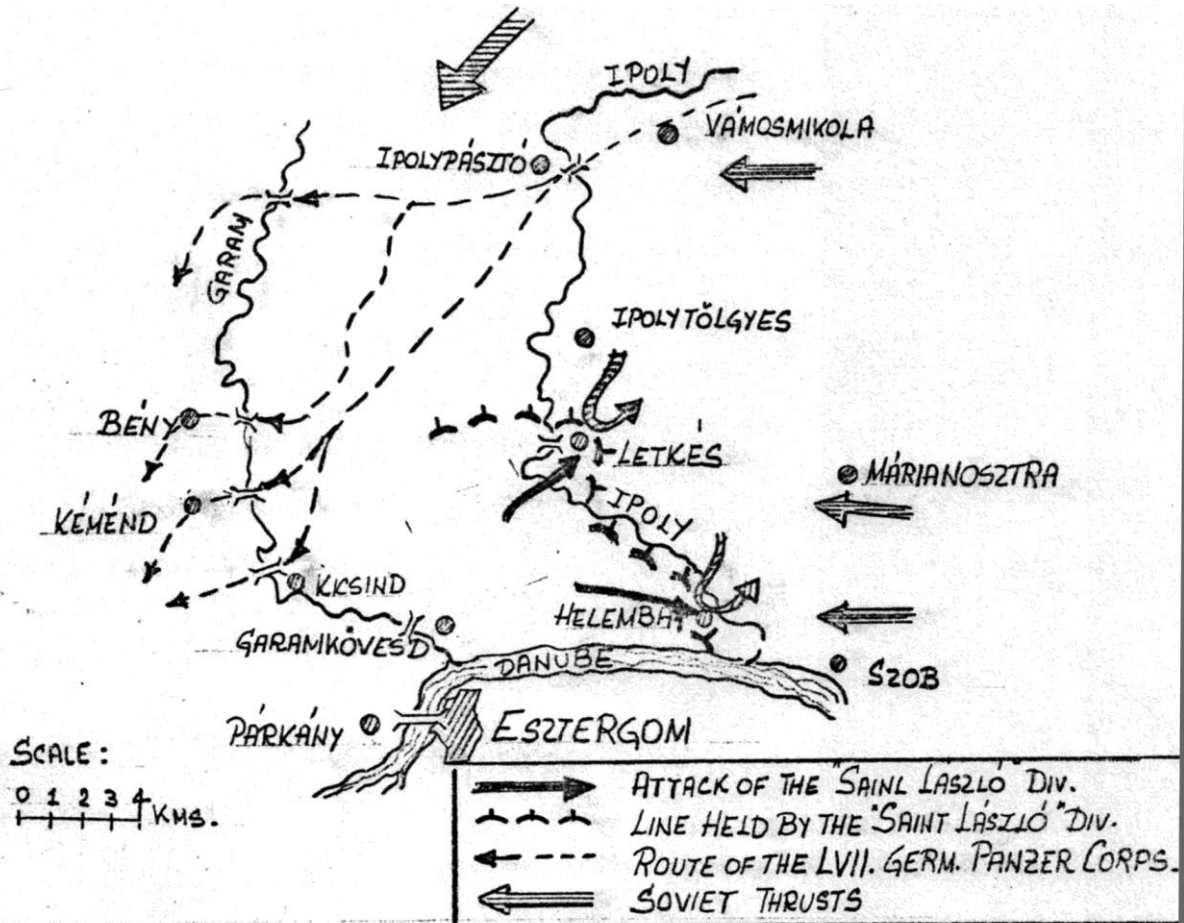


Memorial erected in Kicsind (present day Slovakia) in 2014, on the site of the "Battle of Ipoly" in honor to the heroes of the Szent László Division

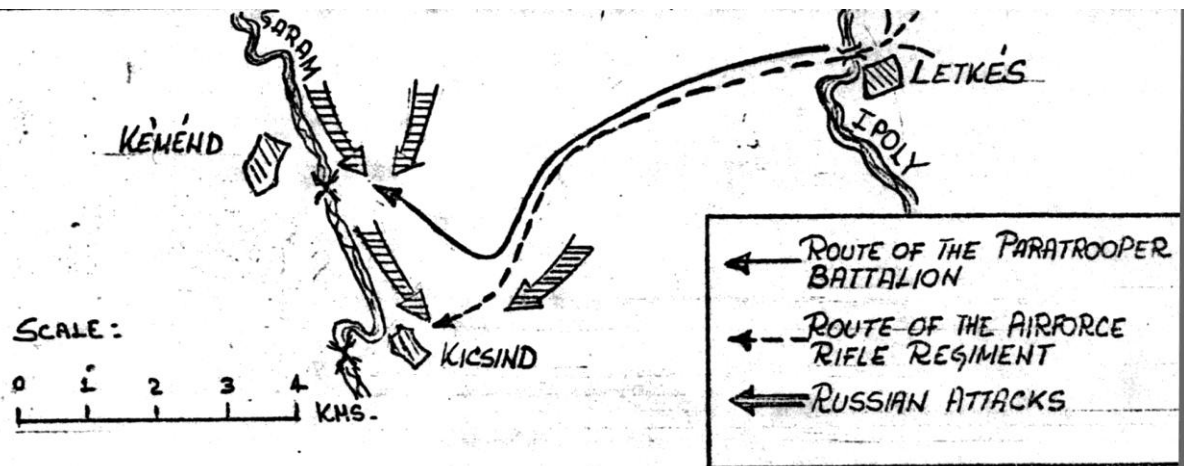
<sup>82</sup> Ref: Darnóy: "A Budapestért vívott harc" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. April 1969, pg. 10.

<sup>83</sup>Ref: Darnóy: "A Budapestért vívott harc" (The battle for Budapest) Hadak Útján. April. 1969 pg. 10.

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THE BATTLE OF "SAINT LÁSZLÓ" DIVISION DEC 22-27, 1944.



THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE AIRFORCE RIFLE REG. & THE 2ND. PARATROOPER BATTALION DEC 27, 1944.

## 4.2. Operation “Spring Awakening”.

Operation *Frühlingserwachen* (“Spring Awakening”) (6 – 16 March 1945) was the last major German offensive of World War II. The offensive was launched in Hungary on the Eastern Front. This offensive was also referred to in Germany as the Plattensee Offensive, in the Soviet Union as the Balaton Defensive Operation (6 – 15 March 1945), and in English as the Lake Balaton Offensive.

The offensive begun by the Germans in great secrecy on 6 March 1945. They launched attacks in Hungary near the Lake Balaton area. This area included some of the last oil reserves still available to the Axis. The operation involved many German units withdrawn from the failed Ardennes Offensive on the Western Front, including the 6<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Army. Almost inevitably, Operation *Spring Awakening* was a failure for the German Army.<sup>84</sup>

After the fall of Budapest, the Soviet armies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front stood poised to overrun the rest of Hungary and make their long overdue strike at Vienna. The German military leadership however was determined to save the important oil fields southwest of the Balaton, in the vicinity of Lisse and Nagykanizsa. After the loss of the Romanian oil fields, these fields were supplying 80% of the crude oil necessary to the war effort at this time. Furthermore, the OKH now realized its previous mistake of neglecting the Danube as the main line of defense (contrary to the advice of the Hungarians) and wanted to reestablish its defense along the river. Considering the power balance however, it was also evident that for the counterattack to be successful at all, the German-Hungarian forces had to strike quickly before the Russian offensive. The code name for the operation was “*Frühlingserwachen*” - “Spring Awakening”.



Gen. „Sepp” Dietrich

The main strike force, the 6<sup>th</sup> SS German Panzer Army under the command of Gen. “Sepp” Dietrich, was to attack along the Sárvíz Canal southwest toward the Danube. The German command had made its plans without consulting the Hungarian military leadership, consequently the selection of the terrain for the main attack, particularly for heavy tanks was not a good one. But if the Germans had asked any local Hungarian farmer he would have told them the same thing. “Sárvíz” in Hungarian means “Mudwater” and unfortunately the area around the Sárvíz Canal during the spring thaw and rains truly turns into “mud water”.

Gen. Dietrich's SS panzers were to be supported by the 25<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division, and the “NEY” Hungarian Assault Group, as follow up infantry, along with some of the German Panzer grenadier units.

South of Lake Balaton the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army commanded by Generaloberst de Angelis was also to strike due east toward the city of Kaposvár. The third attack was to be from across the River Drava by a Corps of Army Group “E” toward the cities of Pécs and Mohács. The plan was to isolate the Russian forces south of the Balaton, with a pincer movement from the north and south while keeping them occupied with a frontal attack.



Gen. De Angelis

<sup>84</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Spring\\_Awakening](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Spring_Awakening)

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The attack commenced on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, and again with promising initial success. After only a few days the German panzers pushed deep into the Russian positions. By March 6<sup>th</sup> the German armor units had reached the Sió Canal and the Hungarian infantry units retook the town of Siófok. The attack of the main task force followed almost the same route as that of the second relief attempt of Budapest. The hopes of clearing Transdanubia of the Russians had been raised again for a few days.



**German Tiger advancing through the Sárvíz region**

The advancing troops heard of incredible horror stories of Russian atrocities committed against the civilian population. The uncontrolled looting, brutality and raping by Soviet soldiers had no limit, victimizing young teenage girls and old grandmothers alike. In many instances, the drunken soldiers next to the corpse of their murdered father or husband, raped the young girl or wife. The most horrible atrocities had been committed by the Kazakhs, the Mongols and the other Asiatic troops. No one could exaggerate the suffering of the population during the first weeks of Soviet occupation, and those were the fortunate ones, who were able to hide and avoid the “liberators”.

In just a few days however an unexpected early spring thaw produced hideous muddy conditions around the Sárvíz Canal, and as the German panzers became sitting ducks in the face of the stiffening enemy opposition the counter attack ground to a halt.

By March 9<sup>th</sup> the offensive was at a stalemate again. Then under the overpowering pressure the spirit of the overworked and under strength crack panzer troops had faltered and they began to retreat leaving their bogged down and disabled Panther and Tiger tanks behind. The outraged German military leadership retaliated by ordering these SS panzer divisions to be stripped of their divisional ambles and standards. Among the disgraced divisions were the “*Das Reich*”, “*Wochenstauffen*” and the Führer's own “*Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*” Divisions.

With the conclusion of this ill-fated counterattack the initiative slipped to the Soviet forces again as they resumed their overwhelming drive to take western Hungary.





### 4.3. The status of the Hungarian forces in the spring of 1945.

In March 1944, there was still an appreciable Hungarian fighting force of approximately 200,000 troops left in the Carpathian Basin. (Among these were about 3000 Gendarmes as front line rifle troops.) It is true the most of the Hungarian units were not up to their battle strengths. They were short on heavy and antitank weapons and particularly had no armored vehicles or tanks and were plagued most of the time by ammunition and supply problems. Nevertheless, they were still on the front line fighting.

These units were deployed in three major combat areas:

On the most northern flank in north-western historical Hungary, (which is Slovakia now) along the Nyitra (Nitra) and Vág (Vah) Rivers in vicinity of Lipótvár (Leopoldov), the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army, commanded by General Colonel László. This group consisted of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountaineer Division. The 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army was in the sector of Army Group Center and had been subordinated to the Heinrici Army Group. Gen. Heinrici, the scion of an aristocratic German military family was a tough soldier, gallant gentleman and an excellent strategist and above all a just man. There was a good understanding and trust between him and Gen. László, and consequently a rather good relationship existed between the Hun-

garian and the German troops in this area. In December 1944 when Gen. Heinrici was absent for a while he even trusted General László with his command. (Probably the only case during the war, when a non-German general commanded an army group. )

The remnants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army under the command of General Colonel Heszlényi were scattered, in the center, along both banks of the Danube and north of the Lake Balaton throughout the front sector of Army Group South. These were the units, which had suffered the most severe battle casualties in the particularly fierce fighting around the Budapest Székesfehérvár area. Unlike Gen.



Hungarian infantrymen armed with „panzerfaust”

Heinrici, Gen. Wöhler, the commander of the Army Group South was mistrustful toward the Hungarian commands. He constantly tried various devious means to dissolve the higher Hungarian commands and subordinate the Hungarian units piecemeal into the German divisions. Gen. Wöhler's hostile attitude with a few honorable exceptions was carried all the way through his command and culminated in the infamous “Balck Orders”. (To be described later. ) These Hungarian units were usually forgotten by the German field commanders, except in the case of failures when they were used as the scapegoats. The situation was particularly bad with the SS troops. Usually these Hungarian units were ordered to cover the retreat of the German troops as an expendable element. The problems had been further compounded by the fact that the Hungarian troops needed different small arms ammunition than that of the German troops and the smaller isolated Hungarian units very frequently could not be supplied by the German field commanders.

It would be almost impossible to list the numerous battalions and smaller sized Hungarian units under the various German commands, throughout the 8<sup>th</sup> German, the 6<sup>th</sup> German SS Panzer and the 6<sup>th</sup>. German Armies. Only a partial list is compiled here. Administratively the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army Command had retained command of these troops, which was initially subordinated to the 6<sup>th</sup> SS. Panzer Army command of Gen. Dietrich and later to the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army command of Gen. Kreysing.

The following units were deployed on the northern bank of the Danube (now Slovakia, but at the time Hungary.):



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The 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, but one of its Regiment subordinated to the “*Feldherrnhalle*” German Corps. The remnants of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division that were practically obliterated in the bridgehead position at Látatlan and 22 field artillery batteries under the leadership of Colonel Ámon units had been ordered to support German infantry troops.

The following units were located south of the Danube under the VIII. Hungarian Corps Command of General Major Hankovszky:

The 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division without it's field artillery the units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armor Division integrated into the German “*Totenkopf*” SS Panzer Division, the remnants of the Hussar Division which was also practically obliterated in the fierce combat in the Vértes Mountains. The 1<sup>st</sup>. Hungarian Assault Regiment (also known as the NEY Group), subordinated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> SS Panzer Division and the entire field artillery of the VIII Corps of 16 batteries subordinated directly to various German commands. Later the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountaineer Division, which marched to this area from the 1<sup>st</sup> Army sector was also in this group.



**Lt. Fld. Marshal  
v. István Kudriczy**

The third larger grouping of the Hungarian troops was along the northern shores of Lake Balaton facing east under the II. Hungarian Corps Command of Lt. Field Marshal István Kudriczy. These forces consisted of the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, but one of its regiments and one if it's field artillery battalion transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army sector, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the Szent László Division. However 27 batteries of the corps' field artillery had been ordered by the German army command to support German infantry units, so only 12 batteries of the Szent László Division remained to support the Hungarian troops. The II Corps was subordinated initially to the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army Command of Generaloberst (General Colonel) Balck and later to the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army Command of Generaloberst de Angelis.

South of Lake Balaton under the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army, were the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Replacement Divisions and the anti-aircraft artillery units originally ordered to defend the oil refineries of Lispe but also deployed in antitank assignments, and the then forming “*Hunyadi*” Hungarian Panzer Grenadier Division.

As an interesting point, one cannot avoid to notice the unusually large number of Hungarian field artillery batteries ordered to support German units. It may be explained by the excellence of the Hungarian field artillery, which was well known by both, the Germans and the Russians. Its effectiveness stemmed from its high *esprit de corps* and the use of an ingenious device; the “Ternegg Instrument” named after its inventor Gen. Ternegg. This device enabled the Hungarian field artillery to make quick, reliable and accurate fire concentrations. Army Group South in its communiqué on, April 24<sup>th</sup> gave the following account of the Hungarian field artillery “...their excellent training, their mobility, their quick fire response and reliable accuracy provides an excellent support to the fighting infantry, further more they show unyielding resistance in close combat also.”<sup>85</sup>

Ever since the fall of Budapest, General Beregfy of the Hungarian High Command had made several attempts to strengthen the Hungarian combat forces in Western Hungary, and he requested the regrouping of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army from Slovakia to Transdanubia. Finally in early March the OKH gave its consent. As a first step the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountaineer Division had marched to this front sector to the vicinity of Győr and the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army Command was relocated there. Gen. László had been informed by the OKH through Gen. Heinrici, that he was to take command of all the German and Hungarian forces in the area between the Danube and Lake Balaton. This of course meant that Gen. László's new superior would be General Wöhler of Army Group South.

Gen. Wöhler received Gen. László very cordially and he confirmed the OKH intentions. At

<sup>85</sup> Ref. Darnóy: “*Honvéd idegen földön*” (The Honvéd on Foreign Soil). Hadak Útján. Nov. 1980 pg. 11.

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the time, he gave Gen. László an optimistic and unrealistic briefing not mentioning the seriousness of the situation. At the same time Col. Csetkey, Gen. László's Chief of Staff paid a visit to Lt. Col. Siegler, the Hungarian liaison officer at Army Group South headquarters and was surprised to find out that no one knew anything about Gen. László's new command.<sup>86</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this book to determine what was on Gen. Wöhler's mind, but the fact remains that Gen. László never received the command he was promised, instead he ended up in Graz, Austria with his staff without a mission, and the remaining divisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army were never transferred to western Hungary.



Gen. Dezső László



<sup>86</sup> Ref. Darnóy: "Utolsó csaták magyar földön" (The Last Battles on Hungarian Soil) Hadak Útján. Jan. 1977.

#### 4.4. The soviet thrust into western Hungary

After the failure of the “Spring Awakening” operation as the Russians reopened their offensive on March 16<sup>th</sup> the German-Hungarian forces were condemned to fight a desperate defensive battle against great numerical and material superiority. The fighting morale of the Hungarian troops probably would have had deteriorated quickly, had it not been for the large scale atrocities of the Soviet troops against the civilian population. The trail of the Soviet troops was marked by unchecked looting, anarchy and thousands of rape victims everywhere.

The “Stavka's” plan was to split the scant Hungarian-German defense north of Lake Balaton with a two pronged attack. Along the Danube, Marshal Malinovsky's 46<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army, commanded by Gen. Petrushevsky was to thrust toward the city of Győr, while Marshal Tolbukhin's 43<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies were to break through the Bakony Forest due north-west. The Danube Soviet Flotilla, the 9<sup>th</sup> Guard Army, the 6<sup>th</sup> Guard Tank Army, the 26<sup>th</sup> Army and the 27<sup>th</sup> Army had also joined the attack. The 18<sup>th</sup> Soviet Air Army commanded by Air Marshal Golovanov provided devastating air support. Opposing the overwhelming onslaught in that front sector stood the under strength units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian, the 6<sup>th</sup> German and the 6<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Armies. On March 17<sup>th</sup>, the Hungarian High Command recorded the following situation:

*“North of Székesfehérvár the enemy has reached the Székesfehérvár-Mór Highway, and north of that the western slopes of the Vértes mountains, where our Hussar Division is engaged in heavy combat . There are several 2-4 km. gaps along the front”*<sup>87</sup>

The northern prong, the 46<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army managed to drive a wedge between the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian and the 6<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Armies, isolating the Hungarian and German forces on the left flank. The remnants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army (about 20,000 troops) cut off from the rest of the defense took up a hedgehog position along the Danube around the village of Lábatlan. The Hungarian position posed a threat however to the flank of the 46<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army, therefore Marshal Malinovsky demanded of Gen. Petrushevsky the immediate elimination of the bridgehead. Petrushevsky ordered his X. Guard and XIII. Corp to an intensive attack at dawn on March 20<sup>th</sup>. The Hungarian Army, however, held firm all day long. The Soviets couldn't make any significant gains on the next day either. On that day the most intensive combat occurred at the village of Dunaalmás, where the units of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division, commanded by Gen. Major Fehér, repelled the heaviest attacks and destroyed seven Russian tanks. On the same day Gen. Dietrich ordered the II. SS Panzer Corps, commanded by Gen. Bittrich, to counterattack and relieve the encircled units. The relief force however failed to reach the bridgehead. With the failure to establish a connection with the encircled units, both Gen. Heszlényi and Gen. Dietrich requested permission to evacuate the position, but it was denied by the OKH. The prolonged holding of the positions caused very heavy casualties, particularly in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division which was practically obliterated by the time permission to evacuate was received.

On the southern flank of the Danube-Balaton Front, the unfortunate city of Székesfehérvár fell for the second time on March 21<sup>st</sup>. In a ten day battle, Soviet forces fought their way through the Bakony Forest and took the town of Pápa, on March 26<sup>th</sup>, as they gained more and more momentum through their advance. Both sides suffered heavy casualties but while the defenders were continually decreasing in number, the Soviet forces had seemingly inexhaustible source of fresh reinforcements.

Although the following radiogram sent by the II. Hungarian Corps to the Hungarian High Command describes the conditions particular to itself, it well describes the general situation, concerning the German troops and the lack of fuel.

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<sup>87</sup> Ref: Adonyi: “A magyar katona.....” pg. 88 op.cit.

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*“Situation 3/24, 10:00 hours: The units of the German Cavalry Corps and our Szent László Division will attempt to stop the advance of the major Soviet Armor units at Vörösberény and Nemesvámos. Since 4:00 hours, Szentgál is in the hands of the enemy. In my opinion the German units have slipped out of the hands of their leadership and for the past two days they have been fleeing back in great numbers. There are hardly adequate forces to defend Nagyvázsony. The lack of fuel is catastrophic if we do not get fuel from the Hungarian supplies our mechanized artillery and our assault guns cannot be saved Impression: I don't think the stopping of the enemy at the Nagyvázsony-Városlőd line is likely.*

*Command Post: Kapolcs, north-east of Tapolca.*

*Lt Field Marshal Kudriczy*

*Commander, II Corps.”<sup>88</sup>*

On March 27<sup>th</sup> the Russians opened the last phase of their attack to take the remainder of Hungary. It was a harsh and brutal assault against the hastily prepared scant defense.

North of the Danube the 7<sup>th</sup> Guard and the 46<sup>th</sup> Armies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian-Front managed to cross the River Garam (Hron) and took the town of Érsekújvár (Nove Zamky), than pressed forward, taking Komarom (Komarno) and crossing the Nyitra (Nitra) and Vág (Vah) Rivers, advancing toward Pozsony (Bratislava).

On the southern bank of the Danube on March 28<sup>th</sup>, the city of Győr fell to the 6<sup>th</sup> Guard Tank Army as it crossed the River Rába. On March 27<sup>th</sup> Celldömölk fell to the 9<sup>th</sup> Tank and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies, and on march 29<sup>th</sup>, Szombathely and Kőszeg were lost.

Along both shores of the Lake Balaton the armies of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front were attacking. Along the northern shore, the 27<sup>th</sup> Army under Gen. Trofimenko took Zalaegerszeg. South of the lake the 57<sup>th</sup> Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army took Nagykanizsa, Lipe and Körmend on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

On April 1<sup>st</sup> the most western city of Hungary, Sopron fell and by April 4<sup>th</sup> the entire country had been taken by the Red Army. Although the defense was futile for the most part it was brave and the valor of the defenders must be noted.

From March 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> the Szent László Division was involved in very heavy combat as the rear guard unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> German Cavalry Corps. Its most difficult day occurred on March 28<sup>th</sup> in the vicinity of the village of Zalaszántó where the remnants of its paratrooper battalion suffered 60% casualties on a single day. These paratrooper units commanded by Major Tassonyi and Captain Ugron, held off a Russian force at least four times larger, then they fought their way of the inferno of two encirclements. On March 29<sup>th</sup> the Grenadier battalion of the division commanded by Capt. Pálfi displayed exceptional bravery in defending the bridge over the River Zala, near the village of Kustány.

On March 30<sup>th</sup> the Gendarmerie Battalion of Szombathely commanded by Capt. Jani was engaged in fierce combat near the village of Zalaszentiván. In spite of their very heavy casualties, they had destroyed 7 Soviet tanks and had beaten off the Russian onslaught until the battalion was practically obliterated.

On March 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> the units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Mountaineer Brigade commanded by Col. Barátosy showed outstanding courage as a rear guard unit as they repelled the heaviest Russian attacks along the River Rábca.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Assault Regiment commanded by Col. Ney, as a very rare exception was equipped with German weapons. Although this unit had lost 770 troopers out of its original 4921 men, it performed very well. Within a two week period he destroyed 50 Soviet tanks.

The Hungarian Army's 80 mm. “Bofors” anti-aircraft gun was a formidable all-around weapon, which was heartily disliked by those who had to confront it. During the last phase of the war, it was allotted not only to anti-aircraft but also to anti-tank duties. Consequently the anti-aircraft battal-

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<sup>88</sup>Ref: Darnóy: “Végső harcok”. Hadak Útján, July, 1976. pg.. 11



The 80mm „Bofors” AA gun

defending the oil fields near Nagykanizsa, in the vicinity of the villages of Lispe, Lovászi, and Bázakekerettye.

There were a number of other Hungarian units, which had fought with distinction to the very end of the war. These were some of them:

Four Gendarmerie battalions and a mounted Gendarmerie Company as rifle units, mostly in south-western Hungary and in the “*Muraköz*” Region, some of them later joined the Szent László Division.

The remnants of the 20<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Infantry Division, commanded by Gen. Maj. Tilger southwest of Lake Balaton, the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commanded by Lt. Col. Boldus, the 84<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Endrődy and the II. Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion commanded by Maj. László, (the later in antitank deployment).

Also in southwestern Hungary, the remnants of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division commanded by Col. Kalkó that of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division commanded by Col. Martsa and the 216<sup>th</sup> Fortress Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Goór, which later also joined the Szent László Division.

Unlike in the front sector of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army, under the command of Generaloberst de Angelis, there were hardly any Hungarian units larger than a battalion, fighting throughout the front sectors of the 6<sup>th</sup> German (Gen. Balck), 6<sup>th</sup> SS German Panzer (Gen. Dietrich), and the 8<sup>th</sup> German (Gen. Kreysing) Armies. Gen. Wöhler and Gen. Balck have tried deliberately to break up the larger Hungarian units and integrate them into the German divisions. As these units were scattered north from Lake Balaton to the Danube and along both banks of the river under various German commands, most of the records are very sketchy and those originating from the German sources mostly are erroneous sometimes are even malicious. The standard practice of most German field commanders in this region was to put the blame for the failure to stop the Russian advance on the small Hungarian isolated units under their commands. Nevertheless, even under these adverse conditions we have records of the following units fighting to the final days of the war:

The fragmentary remnants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Armored Division under the supervisory command of Gen. Major Zoltán Zsedényi, the 6<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Field Artillery Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Nagy, and practically the entire artillery of the Hungarian VIII Corps, about 16 batteries supporting various German units. Also the remnants of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division mostly on the northern bank of the Danube and in Csallóköz Island, just south of Pozsony, (Bratislava).

In the sector was the 1<sup>st</sup> German Panzer Army, which was not subordinated to Gen. Wöhler's Army Group South, but to Army Group Center. The Hungarian units were not fragmented as badly, and even after the departure of Gen. László most of them remained under their Hungarian divisional commands, furthermore most of them were placed under the administrative command of the senior Hungarian field officer in the area, Gen. Major Karátsöny. These troops in the

ions were frequently deployed in ground combat as well. Unfortunately, however there were not enough guns for either purpose.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Péterfy had shown outstanding valor in defense of Kőszeg on March 27<sup>th</sup>. In a 4 hour deadly fire fight with the T-34 tanks they fought to their annihilation.

Another such valiant example was shown on April 2<sup>nd</sup> by the batteries

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Valley of the Vág (Vah) and later west of that also fought to the final days of the war.

These units consisted of the remnants of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions and the 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commanded by Lt. Col. Illés, which was subordinated to the 320<sup>th</sup> German “*Volksgrenadier*” Division.

After more than a half of a century, one might ask what made these troops to fight in a hopeless situation, to the end. If it was clear to anyone, it had to be clear to them that the war was lost.

The answer to this perplexing question can be found on the horrific prospects of the Soviet prisoner of war camps, that was common knowledge among the troops. They have seen at first hand in the back and forth battles, the atrocities and the brutality of the Soviet troops against the population. Any day, they kept fighting gave them another day from falling in to the hands of the Russians.



#### 4.5. “Between two pagans for one country does he shed his blood” (or the infamous “Balck Order”).

*Abstract: The above title is a quotation from a XVII. century “Kurucz” song written by warriors, during which period the Hungarians were caught between the “pagan” Moslem Turks and the equally “unchristian like” Hapsburg mercenaries. It seemed that history had repeated itself during the last phase of the war when the Hungarian troops were caught again between a hostile ally and a ruthless enemy.*

Undoubtedly one of the most distinguished Hungarian units during the last phase of the war was the Szent László Division. One of the many proofs of that fact is the unusually large number of German and Hungarian decorations bestowed upon the members of this division. Even Gen. Wöhler did not try to break up this unit, just subordinated it as a whole Division from the II. Hungarian Corps Command to the I. German Cavalry Corps Command of Gen. Harteneck.

The I. German Cavalry Corps and consequently the Szent László Division was deployed along the northern shore of Lake Balaton in the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army's sector commanded by Gen. Balck. The Szent László Division's position was on the left flank of the I. Cavalry Corps joining the units of the IV. SS. Panzer Corps, commanded by Gen. Gille. Marshal Tolbukhin's 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front opened a two pronged attack on March 26-29 against the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army, which until that time was holding firm in its position between the River Drava and Lake Balaton. The 57<sup>th</sup> Soviet and the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Armies commenced the offensive with a frontal attack while the 27<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army was suppose to outflank the German-Hungarian forces with a thrust along the northern shore of the Balaton toward the city of Graz. The first impact of the 27<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army on March 26<sup>th</sup> hit the units of the IV. SS. Panzer Corps and threw them out of their positions. Although the neighboring Szent László Division hung on to its position its left flank became wide open. To avoid certain encirclement Maj. Lajtos the chief operational officer (G-3) of the division on his own initiative issued a withdrawal order to the units without the consent of the higher German commands. (Most probably the quick changing situation did not permit any time-lag. ) Shortly afterwards Maj. Lajtos who was with the front line troops at the time, either was captured or defected to the Russians. During that night however all of the units of the Cavalry Corps withdrew under the fire cover of the 37<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Field Artillery Battalion to avoid the encirclement.

The Szent László Division was very well known by the Russians and Radio Moscow's short wave propaganda broadcast did not waste any time publicizing the capture of its chief of operation, but with a smart twist it gave the impression that the entire division surrendered or defected to the Russians. German intelligence of course monitored these broadcasts and without any further evidence than the enemy's broadcast Gen. Balck assumed the defection to be true, and contributed the Russian advance to the fall of the Szent László Division. By all military standards, it is inexcusable and almost unbelievable, that any army commander would rely on the enemy's propaganda information about the situation of one of his own divisions, but nevertheless Gen. Balck did. (According to some other sources, Gen. Balck based his decision on Gen. Gille's report who supposedly accused the Szent László Division of defecting to the enemy. However in this case also the perplexing question remains why did he not confirm the information through the chain of command with Gen. Harteneck under whose actual command the Szent László Division had fought, or did he not know?) As a consequence on March 30<sup>th</sup>, Gen. Balck issued a retaliatory order with the approval of his superior, Gen. Wöhler against all Hungarian troops. Ironically, on that very same day the Szent László Division was engaged in the heaviest combat action in the vicinity of the village of Zalaszentmihály, as the rearguard unit of the I. German Cavalry Corps, covering the withdrawal of the German units. (See previous chapter, )

These were Gen Balck's orders:

*1. The entire Royal Hungarian Szent László Division on March 30<sup>th</sup> defected to the Russians, and under Russian command began hostilities against the German forces. Based on this terrible deed I am compelled to institute*

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*the following regulations throughout the 6<sup>th</sup> Army.*

*a. All Hungarian troops must be disarmed subordinated to the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, and all of their equipment and ammunition must be handed over to the German forces or to the Reichs Kommissars (Reichsverteidigungs Kommissars. )*

*b. All Hungarian (motorized) vehicles must be turned over to the German forces (Wehrmacht). Assembly points will be designated by the German liaison officer at the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army Command and by the Rear Echelon Command (Korück AOK 6) of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army.*

*c. The Hungarians may keep their horse drawn vehicles.*

*2.. All Hungarian units in the 6<sup>th</sup> Army sector must be moved back by 40 km. Main roads cannot be used for this purpose. The new assembly points will be designated by the German liaison staff and by the deputy commander of the XVIII Corps.<sup>89</sup>*

These orders gave a free license for German atrocities against the unsuspecting Hungarian rear echelon units, situated on Austrian (at that time German) soil. The first victims were Hungarian refugee and non combatant supply columns, which were ambushed by German SS and in some instances even by Austrian “*Volkssturm*” (Home Guard militia) and “*Hitlerjugend*” (Hitler youth) groups. Not only military material was seized but very often personal belongings were plundered at gun point and the “disarming mission” degenerated to highway robbery.

Among the many atrocities, the most disgusting incidents occurred at the Austrian towns of Aspeng, Leoben and Mürzzuschlag. Another example of a regrettable incident was at the city of Wiener-Neustadt, where SS troopers shot two lost Hungarian hussars who were asking for direction, accusing the hussars of desertion.

In Graz (Austria) at the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army Headquarters when Gen. László learned of the “Balck Orders” he tore off his German Knight's Cross and smashed it to the floor, and the German liaison officer referred to the orders as the disgrace of the Wehrmacht.

Eventually the news of German atrocities reached the Hungarian front line troops in Hungary with detrimental demoralizing effects. There were cases of defection or just plain disintegration and dispersion of some units, while in some cases there were armed conflicts between Hungarian and German troops.

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, Gen. Beregfy of the Hungarian High Command issued a strong worded protest to Reichsmarschall Himmler chief of the SS, since most of the atrocities had been committed by sinister SS troopers, (not necessarily German nationals, however) and to the OKH. He also issued a directive to the Hungarian troops concerning their conduct as well as an order to defend their equipment at all cost.

Some of the level headed German commanders had tried to remedy the situation as much as they could. Among them were; Generaloberst de Angelis, the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army, who forbade the “Balck Orders” to be publicized among his troops, Gen. Bötticher who even requested Hungarian Gendarmerie units to be attached to his command to preserve order and of course Gen. Harteneck under whose command the Szent László Division had fought.

Finally after six days of ransacking by the alleged ally, the disgusting situation ended on April 6<sup>th</sup> when Gen. Wöhler was relieved of his command by the Austrian born Generaloberst Rendulic. He withdrew the “Balck Orders” and ordered all confiscated materiel to be returned to the Hungarian troops. (Being an Austrian, Gen. Rendulic probably begun his military career in the old Austro-Hungarian Army and must have been familiar with the Hungarian troops.) Unfortunately however, the demoralizing damage could not be undone and most of the plundered materiel was scattered and could not be recovered.

As a final note to the infamous “Balck Orders” Lt. Gen. Harteneck's farewell orders stand

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<sup>89</sup> Ref. Darnóy: " *Utolsó csaták magyar földön*" (The last battles on Hungarian soil) Hadak Útján. July 1979. pg. 12

### PART III. THE WAR ON HUNGARIAN SOIL

here, that he issued when the Szent László Division left his command on April 5<sup>th</sup> to return to the II. Hungarian Corps.

*"As of today the Szent László Division leaves the Corps. In the recent past, in the course of the defense of its country, this proven division has often demonstrated its fortitude and bravery. I thank the division for the confidence it has put in my leadership and for its good fellowship and I wish good military fortune and glory to follow its banner and its weapons in the approaching difficult times."*<sup>90</sup>

On Gen. Rendulic's directive these orders been publicized to all of the units of Army Group South, along with a directive to restore normal relationship with the Hungarian troops.

The ill remembered "Balck Orders" surfaced again, 32 years after the war when the 83 years old Gen. Balck repeated his accusation of the Hungarian troops and particularly of the Szent László Division, in an interview given to the "Welt am Sonntag" (The World on Sunday) German magazine which had published them in its Jan. 23, 1977 issue.<sup>91</sup> This has caused an overwhelming indignation throughout the free world among the still living Hungarian veterans, and several of them had sent protest letters to Gen. Balck, among them Lt. Col. Falk, one time deputy artillery commander of the Szent László Division. In a cordial reply Gen. Balck stated that he was gratified to learn that the Szent László Division had fulfilled its duty to the end. However according to the knowledge of the author neither Gen. Balck nor the German magazine had made any apologies for the false accusations, nor have they made any corrective public statements to this effect.

It is true that by April 5<sup>th</sup> 1945, the I. Cavalry Corps and consequently the Szent László Division was no longer under Gen. Balck's command as it was subordinated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Panzer Army commanded by General of the Artillery de Angelis. Nevertheless, Gen. Rendulic was Balck's superior and Balck had to be aware of his counter orders. Therefore, the question remains for over a half a century, why has Gen. Balck never been able to admit publicly his enormous mistake and misjudgment, why did it take 32 years for him to admit the truth, but only privately?



**Fighting until the last breath**

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<sup>90</sup> Ref: Darnóy: " Utolsó csaták magyar földön" (The last battles on Hungarian soil) Hadak Útján. July 1979. pg. 13

<sup>91</sup> Ref: Darnóy: " Utolsó csaták magyar földön" (The last battles on Hungarian soil) Hadak Útján..Sept. 1979 pg. 10.

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The Germans opened their last offensive on March 6, 1945, from the direction of Lake Balaton and the Drava to the Danube. However Due to the Soviet superiority it only reached the eastern shore of Lake Velence, and then started to retreat. At the end of March Komárom, Szombathely, Kőszeg and Sopron fell. According to the official position, the last German soldier left the territory of Hungary at Nemesmedves, on April 4. During Communist times, this date was celebrated as the date of “*Felszabadulás*” (Liberation), despite the fact that another repressive occupation has just begun, which lasted for the next 45 years. It is to note that later historical research in 1985 proved this date to be false, since it was April 13 when the last German soldier left Hungarian soil at Pinkamindszent.

At a time lapse of over seventy years, it is easy to make an impassionate account of another era. Most of the active participants of that time have left us and it is up to a new generation to search and uncover the truth. The lines slowly get blurred between the winning and the losing sides. History teaches us that the losing side can have good men and heroes as well, regardless of the politics involved. Just think of the 300 Spartans under King Leonidas who sacrificed themselves in 335 BC. to hold off 100,000 Persians at Thermopylae, or the 188 Americans who held out at the Alamo against 3000 Mexicans in 1836, or Napoleon's Old Guard who fought to the last man at Waterloo. They are all heroes of lost battles, and they live in history forever.

Thus, this book is a tribute to those who fought with honor in the Second World War. Many of them lay in unmarked graves in unknown places, but they live in the pages of history forever. All along during this war, the Hungarian Army was relegated under the command of the German Wehrmacht. The relationship between the Hungarian and German troops was like a bad marriage, it fluctuated between love and hate. The Hungarian troops were only a small part of the entire Eastern Front, where they usually received their orders from the higher German commands often assigned as sacrificial rearguard units. Despite great leadership from the General Corps, Germany lost the war by the timeless old mistake of underestimating the enemy. This became painfully true with the Battle of Stalingrad, after which the fortunes of war changed for the worse for the Germans.

Hungarian troops never fought against the Western Allies (U.S., Great Britain, France etc.) They fought only the Soviet Troops, which fight at the end became a desperate and hopeless effort. Still the soldiers fought on for several reasons: fear of becoming a prisoner of war, feeling of patriotism in defending the Homeland from the Communist scourge, and last but not least - as good soldiers - unquestioning obedience to the commands of their superiors. Because, on the heels of the Soviet troops came the Communists to Hungary, with unprecedented hate and intent to eliminate the Hungarian spirit. To prove the point, all one has to do is to observe the fate of the Hungarian military leaders and their German counterparts after the war. The ignorant mistakes of Trianon were unfortunately repeated again at the Paris peace conference in 1945. Hungary lost all her regained territories and was forced back to the Trianon dictated borders.

In 1956 the Hungarian nation rose again in a glorious uprising against the Communist rule, proving that the Hungarian spirit could not be destroyed, and Hungary will live for another millennium.

Our first Christian king, Saint Stephen - according to tradition - before his death in 1038, offered up his crown to the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking for her protection for his nation. Looking back to our long history, after so much adversity, many of us believe, she is truly with us till the end of times.



## APPENDIX I



## APPENDIX I

# APPENDIX I - THE GENERALS AND COMMANDERS

The translation of Hungarian military rank is based on European equivalents. For those readers who are unfamiliar with these rank designations, a table of equivalence is presented below: <sup>92</sup>

RANK	US ARMY Equivalent	HUNGARIAN Equivalent
Captain (Capt.)	Captain	Százados
Major (Maj.)	Major	Őrnagy
Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.)	Lieutenant Colonel	Alezredes
Colonel (Col.)	Colonel	Ezredes
Brigadier (Brig.)	Brigadier General *	(N.A.)
General Major (Gen. Maj.)	Major General **	Vezérőrnagy *
Lieut. Field Marshal (Lt. Fld. Marshal)	Lieutenant General ***	Altábornagy **
General Colonel (Gen. Col.)	General ****	Vezérezredes ***
Field Marshal (Fld. Marshal)	General of the Army *****	Tábornagy ****

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<sup>92</sup> Ref: Andris J. Kursietis: "The Royal Hungarian Armed Forces 1919-1945".. ARK Publications Co. 1994, pg.4

## Hungarian generals/commanders

### Lieutenant Field Marshal vitéz Zoltán alsókománai Álgya-Pap (1895-1987)

Commanding general of the V Corps. In 1942 in the area of Brjansk and Kursk the 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division under his command wiped out 207 partisan camps. Was awarded the Golden Medal of Valor, for personal valor in battle in the vicinity of Kassa.



Was seriously wounded in battle and in 1945 he was taken prisoner in a Vienna hospital by the Russians and sentenced to 25 years of hard labor. Spent 10 years in Russia, after which he was returned to Hungary. Because of ill health he was released in 1956, and he emigrated to Holland in 1957.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81lgya-Pap\\_Zolt%C3%A1n](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81lgya-Pap_Zolt%C3%A1n)



### Colonel Sándor András. (1899-1985)

Commanded the 1st Air Group in 1942. Later Chief of Staff of the Hungarian Air Force. He commanded the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division defending Pest. When he received orders on Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> from General Hindy to evacuate Pest with the Germans, he refused to do so and surrendered to the Russians. By this time, his command was only a shadow division anyway scattered throughout the city. At first, he served briefly in the “Democratic Hungarian Army” where he was promoted to major general, then later was sentenced to ten years in prison on trumped up charges by the Communists. During the 1956 Revolution he left Hungary and immigrated to Canada but later returned to Austria, Eiseinstadt (Kismárton), where he

died in 1985.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A1s\\_S%C3%A1ndor\\_\(katona\)](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A1s_S%C3%A1ndor_(katona))

### General Major István Baumann. (1894-1966)

He commanded the 12<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Division. Gradually this unit was splintered up by the German command and integrated piecemeal into several German division. The Germans claimed that these reserve units were under strength and poorly equipped, and consequently unreliable to hold their own without German reinforcements. To much of Gen. Baumann's frustration he was able to hold only the administrative command of his division. He was captured during the break out attempt on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>. Soviet courts sentence him to 20 years hard labor for war crimes, but was amnestied in 1955, and returned home to Budapest where he died in 1966.

Ref: <http://www.hatarvadasz.hu/index30.html>



### General Colonel Károly Beregfy (1888-1946)

Between 1939 and 1941 he was commandant of the Royal Military Academy. He fought in the Second World War from 1941 as commander of the VI Corps, and later commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the First Army. In April 1944 he suffered a serious defeat by the Red Army. The commission examining the reasons of the defeat established Beregfy's personal responsibility, so he was dismissed from his field command. After the Arrow Cross Party's coup (15 and 16 October 1944) the new Prime Minister Szálasi appointed Beregfy as Minister of Defense. He also served as Chief of Army Staff. On 30 April 1945 he was captured by American Army troops.

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Brought to trial before the People's Tribunal he denied his guilt throughout. The court sentenced him to death. Beregfy was hanged on 12 March 1946 along with Ferenc Szálasi.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%A1roly\\_Beregfy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%A1roly_Beregfy)



### **Lieutenant Field Marshal Ernő Billnitzer (1889-1977)**

Commander of the Hajmáskér Artillery Training Camp. Commanded the elite Assault Artillery Group named after him during the siege of Budapest. Gave countless examples of personal courage and bravery. The Hungarian made Zrínyi assault vehicles were very effective under his command. Very popular with all of the Hungarian troops, who nicknamed him “*Bill Apó*” (Big Daddy Bill). He did not allow his troops to be splintered up by the German command. Was promoted to Lt. Field Marshal on Feb. 1, 1945. During the break out, personally led a small group of men and advanced all the way to the village of Perbál, where he was finally captured on Feb. 13. He was released from Russian captivity in 1948 but after his return, he was

arrested on trumped up charges and was imprisoned by the Hungarian Communists again, and finally freed in 1956. He died in 1977 in Budapest.



### **Lieutenant Colonel Viktor Falk (1900-1987)**

Battalion commander and instructor at the Artillery Officer's Candidate School in Nagyvárad. Deputy artillery commander of the Szent László Division. After the war emigrated to the USA. Was a close associate of Gen. Gyula Kovács in the Committee for Liberation of Hungary (1956), and president of several Hungarian émigré organizations. Died in Cleveland, May 5, 1987. Buried in the Hungarian plot of Sunset Memorial Cemetery, North Olmsted, OH.



### **General Colonel vitéz Ferenc kisbarnaki Farkas (1892-1980)**

1938-43 commandant of the Military Academy “Ludovika” .

1944 Commanding General of the VI Corps.

His troops defended the Tatár Pass in the Carpathians from May to November, 1944 against the heaviest Soviet attacks.

Was taken prisoner in 1945 by the Americans in Germany, and released in 1946. Here he was involved with several Hungarian émigré organizations. Captain General of the Knightly Order of Vitéz.

Beside his military career he was also committed to the Hungarian Scout movement, organized the 1933 Scout Jamboree and was appointed Chief Scout by Regent Horthy in 1941, which he remained holding until his death in 1980 in Altdorf, Germany.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farkas\\_Ferenc\\_\(katonatiszt\)](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farkas_Ferenc_(katonatiszt))

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### **General Colonel vitéz József Heszlényi (1890-1945)**



Promoted to Lieutenant-General in November 1942, is also appointed to command the IV Corps. In September 1944, the head of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Army. He remained in his post after the Arrow Cross takeover, and was promoted to General Colonel on November 1, 1944. In May 1945 he was captured by the Americans, where he committed suicide shortly thereafter.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heszl%C3%A9nyi\\_J%C3%B3zsef](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heszl%C3%A9nyi_J%C3%B3zsef)



### **General Colonel vitéz Iván kishindi Hindy (1890-1946)**

Commanding General of the I Hungarian Corps, Commander of all the Hungarian troops defending Budapest. Promoted to General Colonel on Feb. 1. 1945. Toward the end of the siege much frustrated and discussed with his German counterpart, for his lack of cooperation. Captured by the Russians on Feb. 11, 1945. After the war returning from Russian captivity, he was condemned by the Communist controlled "People's Court" and executed by hanging.



### **Lieutenant Field Marshal vitéz László gertenyesi Hollósy-Kuthy (1896-1979)**

During the Second World War he served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army. As the Kecskemét 13<sup>th</sup> Light Division commander he led the defense of Osztogorszk, and when it became impossible implemented the outbreak successfully, thus saving the honor of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. In 1944, as commander of 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division he fought in the Battle of Torda, in which Hungarian soldiers intercepted the Soviet and Romanian troops for more than a month, preventing them to occupy northern Transylvania. During the battle, he was promoted to Lieutenant Field Marshal. After the Battle of Torda he protected Transcarpathia from the Soviets as the Corps commander in the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army. After October 16, 1944 under the German pressure he was relieved from his post. At the end of the war, he fell into American captivity and was allowed to return to Hungary in October, but was relieved of duty by the new regime. Later he was stripped of his rank and banished to manual labor in a rural area. In 1953 his banishment was revoked and moved to Székesfehérvár, where he died in 1979.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holl%C3%B3sy-Kuthy\\_L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holl%C3%B3sy-Kuthy_L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3)

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### **Admiral vitéz Miklós nagybányai Horthy (1868-1957)**

Military Aid to Emperor King Franz Josef (1909). He rose to the rank of Admiral in the Navy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Victorious at the Battle of the Strait of Otranto in 1917. Appointed the navy's Commander in Chief in 1918. Organizer of the National Army after WWI. Elected by the National Assembly in 1920 to be Regent of Hungary. He was styled "His Serene Highness the Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary". He served as Regent between World Wars I and II and throughout most of World War II, from 1 March 1920 to 15 October 1944. Deposed by the Germans after the abortive armistice attempt on Oct. 15, 1944. Witness at the Nürnberg war criminal trials in 1945. Emigrated to Estoril Portugal.

Died there on Feb. 19, 1957. Reburied at the family estate in Kenderes, Hungary in 1993.



### **General Colonel vitéz Gusztáv Jány (1883-1947)**

Commanding General of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army during the 1942-43 Russian campaign. Wounded himself, after a successful start his army was nearly decimated under the harsh winter conditions and the overwhelming odds.

After the war he was condemned by the Communist "People's Court" and executed by a firing squad. In 1993 the Hungarian Supreme Court reopened his case and found him innocent of all charges.



### **Lieutenant Field Marshal vitéz Imre Kalándy. (1878-1945)**

He was responsible for the morale and discipline of the Hungarian troops. At age 68, displayed exemplary personal bravery. He was the heart and soul of the defense. Wounded several times, on Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> while directing the evacuation of Pest by the Chain Bridge. Placed in the field hospital at Buda, where he was captured on Feb. 12, along with the other patients. Presumably died with many other wounded there.



### **Lieutenant Field Marshal vitéz Gyula Kovács (1893-1963)**

Commander of the War Academy, 1943-44. Chief of operations, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Commanding General of the IX. Hungarian Corps in the Battle of Torda. His troops held off the joint Russian-Romanian advance at Torda, from Sep 5 to 29, 1944.

After the war, emigrated to Cleveland, OH, where he founded the Committee of Liberation of Hungary (1956). Died (1963) and buried at Calvary Cemetery, Cleveland, OH.

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### **Lt. Field Marshall vitéz István altorjai Kozma (1896-1951)**

The IX Corps of Székely Division was established on 1 March 1942, which later formed the Székely Boarder Guard units, i.e. the Command of the border security forces. Major General István Kozma became its commander. He was in direct command of the 25<sup>th</sup> Artillery Division, which gallantly defended the onslaught of Russian forces through the Tatár Pass in the NE Carpathians. Promoted to Lt. Field Marshall in 1944. Requested retired status after the Arrow Cross takeover in Oct 1944. After release from American POW status in Germany, he returned to Hungary, where he was reinstated in the new army and served in various high positions until after the Communist gained full power and arrested and sentenced him to death. He was executed on Oct 2, 1951.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kozma\\_Istv%C3%A1n\\_\(alt%C3%A1bornagy\)](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kozma_Istv%C3%A1n_(alt%C3%A1bornagy))



### **Lieutenant Field Marshal vitéz István Kudriczy (1896-1969)**

Commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Corps in the final phase of the war. After the war sentenced to a prison term by the Communist controlled Peoples Court, freed during the 1956 Freedom Fight, emigrated to join his family in Pittsburgh, PA, USA, where he died in 1969.



### **General Colonel vitéz Dezső László (1894-1949)**

1941-43 Commandant of the War Academy. During this time in 1942 he was commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> light brigade of Sopron fighting on the Russian front. Later he is Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Army Oct. 1944 - May 1945.

He was captured by the Americans and handed over to the Hungarian Communist regime, where he was condemned by the Communist controlled People's Court and executed by hanging in 1949.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3\\_Dezs%C5%91\\_\(katonatiszt\)](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3_Dezs%C5%91_(katonatiszt))



### **General Major János Legeza (1889-1953)**

Commanded the VII Corps of Miskolc during the most critical phase of the 1942-43 winter campaign on the Russian front.

Imprisoned on trumped up charges by the Communists. Died due to a heart attack incurred by sadistic treatment by a prison guard on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1953.



## APPENDIX I



### **Colonel vitéz Sándor Martsa** (1893-1969)

Commanding Officer of the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Commanded the brave but unsuccessful counterattack at Uryw.



### **General Major vitéz Kornél Oszlányi**, (1893-1960)

The most highly decorated Hungarian soldier in WWII.

During the 1942-43 Russian winter campaign commanded the “rearguards of rearguards” with his 9<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Division of Nagykanizsa, at the Don. He was severely wounded. Later as the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of Kaposvár, he valiantly fought against the intruding Soviet Army at the Carpathian Line, and during the Defense of Budapest, despite his still painful battle wounds.

Eluded captivity, and after the war emigrated to the United States. In 1993 he was posthumously promoted to Lt. Field Marshal by the Hungarian Government. Died in 1960 and buried at Holy Cross Cemetery, Cleveland, OH.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oszl%C3%A1nyi\\_Korn%C3%A9l](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oszl%C3%A1nyi_Korn%C3%A9l)



### **General Major vitéz György nagyrákói and kelemenfalvi Rakovszky** (1892-1962)

1941 appointed to command the 8<sup>th</sup> Border Guard Brigade, later to the post of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army's chief of staff and moves to the Eastern Front on June 20, 1942. For a short period he is also assigned to command the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps. From October 1, 1942, he serves in the Ministry of Defense until his retirement in 1943.

After the war he reactivates serving at the Ministry of Defense, but retires again in 1946. He participates at the Paris Peace Conference in 1946-47 as a military specialist. In 1951 the Communist government strips him of all rank and banishes him to hard labor in a rural village.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rakovszky\\_Gy%C3%B6rgy](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rakovszky_Gy%C3%B6rgy)



**Lieutenant Field Marshal count Marcel Stomm (1890-1968)**

Commanding general of the III. Hungarian Corps, during the most desperate phase of the Don winter offensive.

Lost both of his legs due to frostbite, felt exploited and betrayed by the German ally, fell into Russian captivity in Feb 1943. Released from Russia in 1951, but condemned by the Communist Hungarian courts to a life imprisonment, which was later reduced to 12 years. Yet unexpectedly he was released from prison in 1954 in very ill health. He was officially rehabilitated in 1989.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stomm\\_Marcel](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stomm_Marcel)



**General Major vitéz Ferenc Szabadhegyi. (1891-1962)**

Served in WWI as an Infantry Company commander on the Russian front. Captured. Spent four years in Russia as a POW. Joined the Gendarmes 1921. Served in various posts; Commanding C.O. of the Gödöllő guard detachment, C.O. of the Gendarmerie officers' training school. During WWII he served as the General assigned to the Inspector of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie (1942-43), then as the Deputy, later acting Inspector General (1943-44).<sup>93</sup> Placed in inactive status by the Szálasy government. Emigrated to the US. in Dec. 1951. Died in Lakewood, OH, Nov 30 1962. Buried in Holy Cross Cemetery, Cleveland, OH.



**Colonel Of the Gendarmes Gyula Szilády (1892-1945)**

Commanded the five field Gendarmerie battalions in the defense of Buda. These units fought to the last days of the siege with extra ordinary valor, the 3,160 combat casualties prove the point.<sup>94</sup> Without much exaggeration one might say the Hungarian Gendarmes were the XX. Century Roman legionaries whose iron discipline held out until the very last moment. He was captured by the Russians on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>. Handed over to the Hungarian communists, he was tortured and executed by hanging at the seat of the Hungarian provisional government at Debrecen.

<sup>93</sup> The Royal Hungarian Gendarmes were under the Department of Interior, but being a military outfit it was supervised by the Department of Defense's Inspector of Gendarmerie. The Inspector was always a high ranking general.

<sup>94</sup> Ref Kövendy: *Magyar Királyi Csémdőrség*, (The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie) pg. 250 Toronto, 1973.

## APPENDIX I



### **General Colonel vitéz Ferenc Szombathelyi (1887-1946)**

Chief of the General Staff 1941 - 1944.

1941 Commanded the occupational forces on territories regained from Yugoslavia, where some alleged brutalities happened under his command.

Commanded the “Carpath Group”. Chief of the General Staff 1941-44.

Was critical of Hungary’s participation in the war, sought contacts with Western Allies. Was arrested by the Szálasi regime, and incarcerated in Germany. He was freed by the Americans, but later extradited to Hungary. There, he was sentenced to life imprisonment by the “People's Court” later handed over by the Communist bosses to Tito's Yugoslav Communists and executed at Újvidék, (Novi Sad) under sadistic conditions on Nov. 4, 1946. In 1994 he was rehabilitated posthumously.

(The Chief of General Staff was the highest military post in the country, comparable to the Joint Chief of Staff in the US.)

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szombathelyi\\_Ferenc](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szombathelyi_Ferenc)



### **General Major vitéz Zoltán Szügyi (1896-1967)**

Senior paratrooper officer. Commander of the Szent László Division. One of the most successful field commanders of the war. After the war he was sentenced by the Communist controlled People’s Court to 10 years of hard labor. He was freed during the 1956 uprising, but later recaptured. Finally released in 1957, spent his remaining life as a laborer.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sz%C3%BCgyi\\_Zolt%C3%A1n](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sz%C3%BCgyi_Zolt%C3%A1n)

### **Major László Vannay.**

Commanded an all-volunteer paramilitary unit, often referred to as the “*Vannay Battalion*”. This unit also fought with great courage to the last day of the siege. He was killed in action during the breakout attempt on Feb. 12.



### **Lieutenant Field Marshal vitéz Antal Vattay (1881-1966)**

Served as a Hussar officer in WWI, and as a Commanding General of the Hussar Division in WWII. Spent time on the Russian front, but because of his clandestine assistance to the Polish rebels in Warsaw, fell into disfavor by the Germans and had to be relieved of his command. He held the second highest military post in the country, Chief of the Military Chancellery of the Regent. Became close advisor to the Regent, and assisted in the preparations of the ill fated armistice attempts with the Russians on Oct 1944. He was arrested by the Szálasi regime and was sent to detention in Germany, where he was freed by the Americans. Subsequently extradited to Hungary, where he was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. In 2001 he was posthumously exonerated from all charges.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vattay\\_Antal](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vattay_Antal)



**General Colonel Lajos dálnoki Veress.** (1889-1976)

He finished his studies at the Ludovika Military Academy in 1910 and served as chief of staff of the Cavalry Division between 1933 and 1935. After that he had been a military attaché to Vienna in 1935-1938. From 1938 to 1940 he served as commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. In 1940 he was the leader of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Brigade as major general. Soon he was promoted to lieutenant field marshal and fought at the Don Front as commander of the First Armored Division. Between 1942 and 1944 he served as commander of the 9th Corps. He was appointed commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 1 April 1944.

Veress was sentenced to death on 16 April 1947 on charges of right-wing, anti-state conspiracy by a People's Tribunal. The National Council of People's Tribunals then mitigated and changed the sentence to life imprisonment. He was released during the 1956 uprising and left the country on 3 November 1956. From 1958 he served as chairman of the World Federation of Hungarian Freedom Fighters. Veress died in London. He was buried in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lajos\\_Veress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lajos_Veress)

**Lieutenant Colonel László Veresváry.**

He commanded the Budapest Guard Battalion. A strict disciplinarian and tough soldier. Led a group during the breakout and succeeded to reach the village of Piliscsaba, where he was killed in action on February 16.



**General Colonel vitéz János Vörös** (1891-1968)

1939-1940 was the head of the 7/ö Signal Department of the Army Chiefs of Staff, as Staff Colonel. Promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General in 1941, commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> mechanized brigade. In 1942, he is head of the Field Operations Group of the Army Chiefs of Staff. Later heads up the Finance Group in the Ministry of Defense. Promoted to Lt. Field Marshal in 1943.

Because of his overly pro-German attitude the then Chief of Staff, Gen. Szombathelyi assigned him to command the II Corps of Székesfehérvár to keep him away from the Ministry of Defense. On the day of the German invasion of March 19, 1944 he is promoted to General Colonel and appointed Chief of Staff to succeed Gen. Szombathelyi. His pro-German stance fades when he finds himself refusing Hitler's demands. In the fall of 1944 he gives himself up to the advancing Russian army. Becomes a member of the Provisional Government Delegation in Moscow and is a signatory to the Armistice Agreement. He participates in the Debrecen Provisional Government as the new Minister of Defense, until he requests his retirement in 1946. Reason: he said to communist premier Rákosi: "...if I didn't sell the country out to Hitler, I certainly will not sell it out to you!" In 1949, the Military Political Police arrested him on charges of espionage for the West, and in 1950 a military court sentenced him to life imprisonment. He was freed in 1956, totally broken physically and spiritually (he didn't recognize his wife!) and lived out his remaining years in total obscurity.

Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%B6r%C3%B6s\\_J%C3%A1nos\\_\(vez%C3%A9rezredes\)](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%B6r%C3%B6s_J%C3%A1nos_(vez%C3%A9rezredes))

## APPENDIX I



### **General Colonel Henrik Werth (1881-1952)**

He was recalled from retirement in 1938 and became Chief of General Staff. Having German ancestry, he supported Hungary's entry into World War II and believed that Hungary could profit from helping the Germans. He was later dismissed from his post because of making a promise to the Germans that all Hungarian Army units would be available to them (without the permission of Regent Miklós Horthy). He was recalled from retirement in February 1945 by the Soviet Forces, and was immediately arrested. The Hungarian People's Court sentenced him to death because of war crimes. He was transferred to the USSR where he died in 1952.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henrik\\_Werth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henrik_Werth)

## German generals/commanders

For those readers who are unfamiliar with these rank designations, a table of equivalence is presented below:

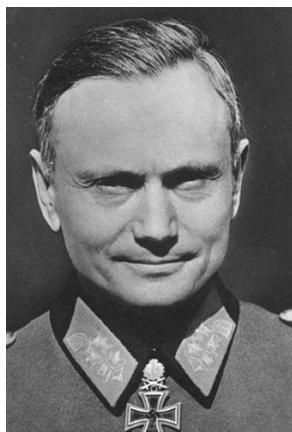
<u>US ARMY</u>	<u>GERMAN HEER</u>	<u>GERMAN WAFFEN-SS</u>
Captain	Hauptman	Hauptsturmführer
Major	Major	Sturmbannführer
Lieutenant Colonel	Oberstleutnant	Obersturmbannführer
Colonel	Oberst	Standartenführer
Brigadier General *	(N.A.)	Oberführer
Major General **	Generalmajor *	Brigadeführer
Lieutenant General ***	Generalleutnant **	Gruppenführer
General ****	General (+branch) ***	Obergruppenführer
(N.A.)	Generaloberst ****	Oberstgruppenführer
General of the Army *****	Generalfeldmarschall *****	(N.A.)
(N.A.)	(N.A.)	Reichsführer-SS

The term, Wehrmacht literally means, *Armed Forces* and covered all branches of the German Armed Forces such as: Heer, (Army), Kriegsmarine (Navy) and Luftwaffe (Air Force). The Waffen-SS was part of the Heer (Army) section of the Wehrmacht.



**Generaloberst Maximilian de Angelis**, (1889-1974) born in Budapest, was a German general of artillery, serving during World War II. He was also a recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves (German: *Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub*), awarded to recognize extreme battlefield bravery or successful military leadership. He was a prisoner of war from 1945 to 1955. Commandant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Army, it was his responsibility to protect the Hungarian oil fields. Because de Angelis had been given this one task Hitler had heavily restricted his operational scope.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximilian\\_de\\_Angelis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximilian_de_Angelis)



**Generalleutnant Hermann Balck**, (1893–1950)

Balck was a very energetic German tank Commander, who rose to command an Army Group in France. Balck was very successful in the opening stages of the Battle of France: he managed to establish a bridgehead across the Meuse at Sedan. He commanded a regiment in the First Panzer Division of Guderian's Group and for Operation Barbarossa he was promoted to command a full Panzer Division. In November 1943 he was given command of the XLVIII. Panzer Corps and took part in the defense of Sicily. In August 1944 he was ordered back to the USSR to command the Fourth Panzer Army but arrived too late to contain Konev's attack in the Ukraine. In September 1944 he was sent to relieve Blaskowitz and pursued a policy of elastic defense, which held up Patton's advance into Lorraine. He was then sent to command the Sixth Army in Hungary but he dis-

pleased Hitler and ended the war commanding a mere subgroup.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann\\_Balck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_Balck)





**SS-Oberstgruppenführer Josef (Sepp) Dietrich, (1892-1966)**

(was (from 1942 to 1945) the highest commissioned rank in the Schutzstaffel (SS), with the exception of Reichsführer-SS, held by SS commander Heinrich Himmler. The rank is translated as “Supreme group leader” and alternatively translated as “colonel group leader”.)

Commandant of the 6<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Army. After the Ardennes offensive had failed the SS Army had a “second chance” to prove itself in Hungary. The whole operation was a huge disaster. “Frühlingserwachen” began on 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1945. Ten days later the Red Army opened up a devastating counter-offensive in the direction of Vienna. After the failure of the operation the 6<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Army (and LSSAH) retreated to the Vienna area. As a mark of disgrace, the Waffen-SS units involved in the battle were ordered by Hitler to remove their treasured cuff titles. Dietrich did not relay the order to his troops. Dietrich, the highest Waffen SS general feared arrest by the SS. After the war, he was imprisoned by the United States for war crimes and later by West Germany for his involvement in the 1934 purge.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepp\\_Dietrich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepp_Dietrich)



**SS-Obergruppenführer und Waffen-SS General Herbert Otto Gille (1897-1966)**

was a German member of the Waffen-SS during World War II. He was a recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds and of the German Cross in Gold, making him the most highly decorated Waffen-SS member of the war. Commandant of the IV. SS Panzer Corps, including two excellent Waffen-SS divisions: the 3<sup>rd</sup> SS Panzer Division, “*Totenkopf*”, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division “*Wiking*”. In January 1945 Gille, as leader of the IV SS Panzer Corps, participated in a failed attempt to relieve the encircled German and Hungarian troops in the Battle of Budapest. In March 1945 he led the IV. SS Panzer Corps in the failed Lake Balaton Offensive. He surrendered to the US forces in Austria. After the war, Gille became active in HIAG, a lobby group and a revisionist veteran's organization founded by former high-ranking Waffen-SS personnel in West Germany in 1951.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert\\_Gille](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Gille)



**Generaloberst Heinz Guderian (1888-1954)**

In 1941, his attack on Moscow was delayed by orders from Hitler with whom he disagreed sharply. After the German defeat at the Battle of Moscow he was transferred to the reserve. This marked the end of his ascendancy.

After the defeat at Stalingrad, Hitler appointed him to a new post, rebuilding the shattered Panzer forces, but he feuded with many other generals, who managed to get his responsibilities re-allocated. He was then appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Army, but this was largely a symbolic post, since Hitler had effectively become his own Chief of Staff. From 1945-48, Guderian was held in U.S. custody, but released without charge. He then advised on the re-establishment of military forces in West Germany.

## APPENDIX I



### **General der Kavallerie Gustav Harteneck (1892 – 1984)**

Commandant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kavallerie Corps, was a highly decorated General in the Wehrmacht during World War II. He was also a recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. The Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross was awarded to recognize extreme battlefield bravery or successful military leadership. Gustav Harteneck was captured by British troops in May 1945 and was held until 1947.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav\\_Harteneck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Harteneck)



### **Generaloberst Gotthard Heinrici (1886-1971)**

In 1941, during Operation Barbarossa, he served in the 4th Army under Günther von Kluge as the commanding general of the XXXXIII Army Corps. He received the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross in 1941. Late in January 1942, Heinrici was given command of the 4th Army. The 4th Army under Heinrici held out against the Soviet offensive for ten weeks. Between 21 October 1943 and 9 March 1944 Heinrici was the mastermind in holding the front opposite Moscow. During the Orsha offensives the Red Army lost 530,000 dead and wounded while Heinrici's 4th Army lost about 35,500 men. Heinrici was awarded the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross on 24 November 1943.

In the summer of 1944, Heinrici was sent to Hungary and placed in command of the 1st Panzer Army; as well as the Hungarian 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which was attached to it. He was able to keep the First Panzer Army relatively intact as it retreated into Slovakia.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gotthard\\_Heinrici](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gotthard_Heinrici)



### **Generaloberst Hermann Hoth (1885-1971)**

Hoth commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Group during Operation Barbarossa in 1941, and the 4th Panzer Army during the Wehrmacht's 1942 summer offensive. Following the encirclement of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army in the Battle of Stalingrad in November 1942, Hoth's panzer army unsuccessfully attempted to relieve it during Operation Winter Storm. After Stalingrad, Hoth was involved in the Third Battle of Kharkov, the Battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943 and the Battle of Kiev.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann\\_Hoth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_Hoth)

## APPENDIX I



### **General der Panzertruppe Willibald Karl Moritz Robert Rudolf Freiherr von Langermann und Erlencamp (1890 – 1942)**

was a Panzer General in the German army during World War II. He was also a recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves. The Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross and its higher grade Oak Leaves was awarded to recognize extreme battlefield bravery or successful military leadership.

On 8 September 1940, he was given command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, which he led at opening stages of Operation Barbarossa. In January 1942 he was promoted to Generalleutnant and commanding general of the XXIV Panzer Corps and he led the German advance on Voronezh. He was killed in action on 3 October 1942 while supporting the attack of the Hungarian infantry.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willibald\\_Freiherr\\_von\\_Langermann\\_und\\_Erlencamp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willibald_Freiherr_von_Langermann_und_Erlencamp)



### **Generalfeldmarschall Eric von Manstein (1887-1973)**

(born as Fritz Erich Georg Eduard von Lewinski)

In the catastrophic Battle of Stalingrad, Manstein commanded a failed relief effort (“Operation Winter Storm”). Later known as the “back-hand blow”, Manstein's counteroffensive in the Third Battle of Kharkov (February–March 1943) regained substantial territory and resulted in the destruction of three Soviet armies and the retreat of three others. He was one of the primary commanders at the Battle of Kursk (July–August 1943), one of the largest tank battles in history. His ongoing disagreements with Hitler over the conduct of the war led to his dismissal in March 1944.

In 1949 he was tried in Hamburg for war crimes and was convicted. His sentence of eighteen years in prison was later reduced to twelve, and he served only four years before being released in 1953. As a military advisor to the West German government in the mid 1950s, he helped re-establish the armed forces.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erich\\_von\\_Manstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erich_von_Manstein)



### **Generalfeldmarschall Friedrich Paulus (1890-1957)**

commanded the Sixth Army in the Battle of Stalingrad (August 1942 to February 1943), including the successful advance toward the city of Stalingrad and the less successful attack in 1942 (part of Case Blue, June to November 1942) stopped by the Soviet counter-offensives during the 1942–1943 winter.

Soviet troops took Paulus by surprise and captured him in Stalingrad on 31 January 1943, the same day on which he was informed of his promotion to field marshal (*Generalfeldmarschall*) by Adolf Hitler.

While in Soviet captivity during the war, Paulus became a vocal critic of the Nazi regime and joined the Soviet-sponsored National Committee for a Free Germany. He moved to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in 1953.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich\\_Paulus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Paulus)



**SS-Obergruppenführer und Waffen-SS General Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch (1888-1971)**

Beginning in December 1944 he was appointed Commanding General of the IX. SS Mountain Corps in Hungary and commander of Budapest. As combat commander, he defended the Hungarian capital after its encirclement by Soviet troops on December 24, 1944 until February 11, 1945. For the defense of the city he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with the Eichenlaub. He was captured by the Russians in Budapest. In 1945 he was convicted in the Soviet Union to 25 years of forced labor but released October 1955, and returned to Germany.

Ref: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl\\_Pfeffer-Wildenbruch](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Pfeffer-Wildenbruch)



**Generaloberst Lothar Rendulic (1887-1971)**

He served as acting general officer in command of the 14th Infantry Division (23 June – 10 October 1940), general in command of the 52nd Division (1940–1942), and general in command of the XXXV Corps (1942–1943). He participated as the XXXV corps commander in the battle of Kursk. From 1943 to 1944, Rendulic commanded the 2nd Panzer Army during World War II in Yugoslavia. Following the death of General Dietl in June 1944, Rendulic commanded the 20th Mountain Army and all German troops stationed in Finland and Norway. In 1945, Rendulic served as the commander-in-chief of Army Group Kurland (Army Group Courland) on the Eastern Front. On 7 May 1945, following the Soviet Prague Offensive, Lothar Rendulic surrendered Army Group Ostmark to the 71st Division of the U.S. Army in Austria

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lothar\\_Rendulic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lothar_Rendulic)

**SS-Gruppenführer (Major General) Joachim Rumohr**

Commanded the 8<sup>th</sup> SS, “Florian Geyer” Cavalry Division. This division was made up of mostly Hungarian born ethnic Germans. Wounded during the break out, committed suicide on Feb. II, 1945, to avoid Russian captivity.

**General major Gerhard Schmidhuber.**

Commanded the 13<sup>th</sup> Wehrmacht Panzer Division. As of Jan. 11 responsible for the overall defense of Pest until Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> when it was evacuated. Killed in action during the break out on Feb. 11. 1945.





**General der Infanterie Friedrich Maximilian Siebert (1888-1950)**

He took part in Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 with the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Fought in the battle for Stalingrad. Later appointed as commander of the 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and fighting on the south side of the Eastern front. Siebert was assigned as temporary commander of XIII Army Corps, became a General of the Infantry on May 5 1943 as Commanding General of the XIII Army Corps. Begin September 1943 he lost this command and landed again in the Reserve. He succeeded General Hans Schirmer as the Chief of the Wehrmacht-Streifendienstes, OKW.

Ref: <http://ww2gravestone.com/people/siebert-friedrich-maximilian/>



**General der Infanterie Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel (1886-1944)**

From 20 December 1940 to 4 October 1941, Stülpnagel was a General of Infantry (April 1939) and commanded the 17<sup>th</sup> Army. On 22 June 1941, after the launch of Operation Barbarossa, he successfully led this army across southern Russia on the Eastern Front. Under Stülpnagel's command, the 17<sup>th</sup> Army achieved victory during the Battle of Uman and the Battle of Kiev.

In February 1942, Stülpnagel was made German-occupied France's military commander, and in this position, he, along with his personal adviser Lieutenant-Colonel Caesar von Hofacker, continued to be active in the conspiracy against Hitler. General Stülpnagel and his adviser were both arrested by the Gestapo, and Stülpnagel was brought before the *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court) on 30 August 1944. He was found guilty of high treason and hanged the same day at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl-Heinrich\\_von\\_St%C3%BClpnagel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl-Heinrich_von_St%C3%BClpnagel)



**Generalfeldmarschall Maximilian Maria Joseph Karl Gabriel Lamoral Reichsfreiherr von und zu Weichs an der Glon (1881-1954)**

Commanding General of Army Group B.

As the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, Weichs took part in 1941 in the Balkan campaign and took the capitulation of the Yugoslav army. In June 1942 Weichs was appointed commander of an Army Group, named after him (*Armeegruppe von Weichs*). His group was subordinated to the Hungarian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army and was ordered to take Voronezh. His group took part in the ill fated Stalingrad campaign, after which he commanded the newly formed Army Group Don, in the Don river campaign, which was similarly obliterated by the advancing Red Army. Promoted to Generalfeldmarschall in 1943. Later, in autumn 1944, commanding the

Army Group F he participated in the organized retreat from the Balkans. At the Nuremberg trials he was accused of war crimes, but sentence commuted because of poor health and was released from custody.

Ref: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximilian\\_von>Weichs](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximilian_von>Weichs)

## APPENDIX I



### **General der Infanterie Otto Wöhler (1894-1987)**

Between October 1940 and May 1942, Wöhler served as chief of staff of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's 11th Army. In this capacity Wöhler cooperated closely with the Einsatzgruppe D under Otto Ohlendorf. Wöhler was then appointed chief of staff of Army Group Center under Field Marshal Günther von Kluge. Wöhler's first combat command was I. Army Corps, which he led from February to August 1943, before being given command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in August 1943. In December 1944 he was appointed commander of Army Group South. Wöhler was tried by a U.S. Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and sentenced to eight years imprisonment in October 1948. He was released in February 1951 on good time credit grounds.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto\\_W%C3%B6hler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_W%C3%B6hler)

### **SS-Brigadführer (Brigadier General) August Zehender.**

Austrian born, commanded 22<sup>nd</sup> SS "*Maria Theresa*" Cavalry Division. Was decorated with the "Oak Leaves" to his Knight's Cross on Feb. 4, 1945.<sup>95</sup> Wounded during the break out, committed suicide to avoid Russian captivity on Feb. 11, 1945. (The Maria Theresa Division consisted of mostly Hungarian and Transylvanian born ethnic Germans.)

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<sup>95</sup> Ref: Hadak Útján ,Nov. Dec. 1999 pg. 8



## Russian generals



### **General Major Ivan Michailovich Afonin (1904-1978)**

His Corps successfully fought in the Battle of Kursk and the military operations in Ukraine. His Corps is transferred from the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front on the east side of Budapest. Involved in the Attila Line breakthrough and in the liquidation of the Pest side bridgehead. He is commander of the Budapest Group of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front as of Jan. 11 1945 in the rank of major general. On Jan. 22, seriously wounded in Buda, is replaced by Lt. Gen. Managorov. After his recovery, once again taking part as commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Corps military operation in Vienna.



**Marshal of the Soviet Union Filipp Ivanovich Golikov, (1900 - 1980)** was a Soviet military commander. He is best known for not passing on to Stalin intelligence about German invasion plans in June 1941, either because he did not believe them or because Stalin made it very clear he did not want to hear them. He commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Army during the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, and in 1940 he served in the war against Finland. He was in charge of the Soviet Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) (1940–41), personally leading Soviet military missions in Great Britain and United States. During the war, he commanded the Bryansk Front (1942) and Voronezh Front (1942–43).

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipp\\_Golikov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipp_Golikov)



### **Marshal of the Soviet Union Rodion Y. Malinovsky (1898-1967)**

Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front.

Was a Soviet military commander in World War II, Marshal of the Soviet Union, and Defense Minister of the Soviet Union in the late 1950s and 1960s. He contributed to the major defeat of Germany at the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Budapest. Stalin has ordered him to take Budapest in less than two weeks, but the defenders held out for 52 days. He led his army to victory, taking the city of Brno in Czechoslovakia, in April, where he met up with the advancing American forces. In August 1945 he was transferred to Manchuria to lead the Russian armies against the Japanese there. During the post-war era, he made a pivotal contribution to the strengthening of the Soviet Union as a military superpower.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodion\\_Malinovsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodion_Malinovsky)



**Lt. Field Marshal Ivan Metojevich Manangorov.**

Commanded the 53<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army and later the “Budapest Battle Group” under Malinovsky. Drove his troops relentlessly to capture Pest.

**General Colonel Issa Alexandrovich Plijev.**

Commanded a combined armor, mechanized infantry and cavalry battle group named after him. Malinovsky used these troops to spearheaded the Soviet Advance toward Budapest. They had very heavy losses; as an example the Hungarian - German forces from October 29 - November 9 destroyed 137 Soviet tanks approaching Budapest. <sup>96\*</sup>

**Lt. Field Marshal Nicolae Sova. (Romanian)**

Commanded the VII Romanian Corps during the siege of Budapest. His troops had a 60% casualty rate. Malinovsky pulled his troops out from the siege on Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> in order not to share the laurels with the Romanians for the capture of Budapest. Later Sova was tried on trumped up charges by the Romanian Communists and sentenced for ten years imprisonment in Siberia. <sup>97</sup>



**Marshal of the Soviet Union Fyodor Tolbukhin (1894-1949)**

In October 1943 the Southern Front was renamed 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front. Tolbukhin assisted Rodion Malinovsky's 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front in the Lower Dnieper Offensive and Dnieper–Carpathian Offensive. In May 1944, Tolbukhin was transferred to control of 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front. During the Summer Campaign, from June to October 1944, Tolbukhin and Malinovsky launched their invasion of the Balkans and were able to conquer most of Romania. On September 12, 1944, two days after Malinovsky was promoted to Marshal of the Soviet Union,

Tolbukhin was promoted to the same rank. While Malinovsky moved northwest, towards Hungary and Yugoslavia, Tolbukhin occupied Bulgaria.

Starting in the Winter Campaign, Tolbukhin shifted his army to the northwest axis, thereby liberating much of Yugoslavia and invading southern Hungary.

<sup>96</sup> Ref: Ungváry K. *Budapest Ostroma* pg. 21 Corvina pub. 1999.

<sup>97</sup> Ref: Ungváry K. *Budapest Ostroma*; pg. 131

## APPENDIX I



### **Army General Nikolai Fyodorovich Vatutin (1901–1944)**

was a Soviet military commander during World War II. Vatutin was responsible for many Red Army operations in Ukraine as commander of the Southwestern Front, the Voronezh Front during the Battle of Kursk<sup>[2]</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front during the liberation of Kiev. He was ambushed and killed in February 1944 by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai\\_Vatutin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Vatutin)



### **Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgy K. Zhukov (1896-1974)**

During World War II he participated in multiple battles, ultimately commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front in the Berlin. The chief architect of the Soviet's Stalingrad victory, who henceforth became Stalin's favorite general. In recognition of Zhukov's role in World War II, he was allowed to participate in signing the German Instrument of Surrender and to inspect the Moscow Victory Parade of 1945.

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgy\\_Zhukov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgy_Zhukov)

## APPENDIX I

## APPENDIX II. HONOR ROLL

**The following is a list of those units, which have fought with honor in the defense of Budapest. (As of Dec. 24, 1944)**

- 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Col. Sándor András. (7,500 men.)
- 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Gen. István Baumann (4,000 men)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, Col. Vértessy (5,000)
- The “Billnitzer” Assault Artillery Group, Gen. Ernő Billnitzer. (Batteries from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> battalions. , 2,000 men)
- The “Budapest” Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade, Col József Kozma . (Batteries from the 204<sup>th</sup>, 206<sup>th</sup>, 206<sup>th</sup>, 208<sup>th</sup>, and the 52<sup>nd</sup>, self propelled battalions., 2,000 men)
- The “Budapest” Gendarmerie Regiment, Col. Gyula Szilády. (Units from the Beszterce, Galánta, Pécs, Székelyudvarhely and Zilah battalions. 3,200 men.)
- 4<sup>th</sup> Hussar Regiment. (1,000 men)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Independent Hussar Squadron.
- The “Budapest” Combat Engineers Group (Approx. 7,000 men)
- The “Budapest” Guard Battalion Lt. Col. László Veresváry. (800 men)
- The “Budapest” University Student's Assault Battalions, Capt. Sipeky, Capt. Zsombor Nagy. (1,000 men.)

**The following “Ad Hoc” units usually named after their CO:**

- The “Vannay” Battalion. (All volunteers 638 men)
- The “Budapest” Police combat team. (600 men.)
- The Morlin group, Cadets from the officers candidate school of Nagyvárad.)
- The Berend, Korányi, Déri and Viharos groups.(Approx. 2,000 men all.)
- The “Hungarist” Combat Team, paramilitary unit.(1,500 men.)
- The “KISKA” non combatant, auxiliary units (7,000 men.)

## APPENDIX II

The following officers were decorated for personal bravery during WWII with the Golden Medal of Valor. (*Tiszti arany vitézségi érem*)<sup>98</sup>, <sup>99</sup>, <sup>100</sup>

1st. Lt. Gyula Ágner, Infantry  
Gen. Maj. vitéz Zoltán Álgya-Pap, General's Corps  
Capt. vitéz József Barankay, Assault Artillery (posthumously)  
Ens. vitéz János Bozsóki, Assault Artillery  
1st. Lt. vitéz Vilmos Branding, Artillery  
1st. Lt. vitéz György Debrödy, Air Force  
Cpt. vitéz László Duska, Infantry  
Lt. Sándor Horváth, Infantry  
Maj. vitéz Tibor Massányi, Infantry  
Ens. vitéz László Merész, Armor  
Lt. vitéz László Molnár, Air Force  
Maj. László Pokorny, Paratrooper  
Capt. Árpád Rehtzügel, Infantry  
Maj. László Siprák, Infantry  
Capt. vitéz Ákos Székely, General Staff  
Col. vitéz György Vastagh, Motorized Infantry

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<sup>98</sup>Source: Adonyi: *A Magyar Katona*

<sup>99</sup> The Golden Medal of Valor was the highest military decoration awarded to officers for personal bravery and valor in battle. These officers became eligible to be inducted into the Order of Vitéz, if not already a member.

<sup>100</sup> Vitéz. (word meaning brave or valiant). A title of honor given to officers and enlisted men.

When used in front of the name it means the person is a member of the Knightly Order of Vitéz, an honorary Institution initiated by Regent Horthy for those persons who earned the distinction of being awarded certain qualifying decorations during WWI or WWII. Such as the Golden Medal of Valor among others. This title could also be passed on to male and female descendants. Officers named with the title of “vitéz” in the above list, and in this book may have earned this title in WWI (if old enough) or may have inherited it from their fathers.



## APPENDIX III - HUNGARIAN ARMOR

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUNGARIAN ARMORED FIGHTING VEHICLES.

The Peace Edict of Trianon forbade the Hungarian Army to have any armored vehicles, and it was not until 1936 that the Army could obtain some Italian made Fiat Ansaldo tankettes. These tankettes were obsolete already at the time, but the army leadership thought that an obsolete “tank” is better than no tank at all. They were armed with a single machinegun.

The **Csaba** reconnaissance armored car was put in service in 1940 by the Army, which had a 20mm. gun. Next, the **Toldi IIa** and the **Nimród** series light tanks were developed each with a 40mm. gun in 1941. These tanks were up to date technology until the appearance of the Soviet T-34 tank on the field early 1943, which made all other tanks obsolete.

The newly developed Soviet T-34 medium and KV-1 heavy tanks had no equal in the Hungarian Army at the time. The infantry was virtually defenseless against these new Soviet tanks, only the field artillery could mount some serious opposition to them.

These tanks with their 75.2 mm. guns and with their 75mm. frontal armors were the best on the field. Bar none! The Russian war industry was turning them out in large numbers, such as 1000 tanks a week.

In response, the Hungarian Army came out with its **Turán** series medium tank in late 1943 and early 1944. Two tank regiments were organized with these Turán tanks. The **Turán I** was equipped with a 40 mm gun and the **Turán II** with a 75 mm gun. The Army fielded a total of 275 **Turán I** and 107 **Turán II** tanks by early 1944. The **Turán II** was the Hungarian army’s answer to the Soviet T-34. While it was somewhat inferior to the T-34, it was capable of knocking it out, and with the fighting spirit of the Hungarian crew, it was a worthy opponent to it.

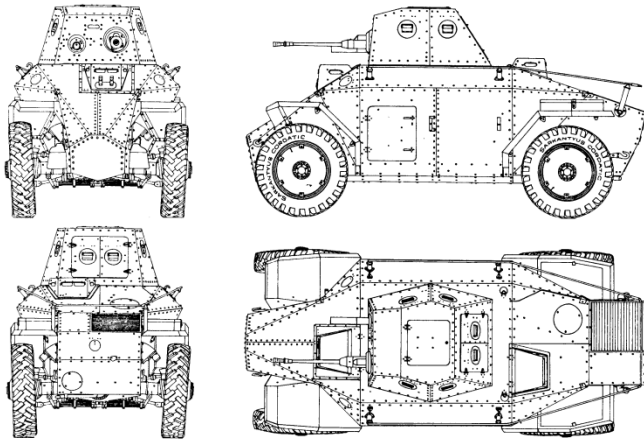
The overwhelming armor-might of the Soviet Army led to the development of the **Zrínyi** assault gun, or self propelled gun. The assault gun is basically a tank, without a turret. It has two advantages over a conventional tank: it is cheaper and easier to manufacture and on the field it presents a smaller target. Disadvantage: the main gun cannot traverse 360 degrees, just plus- and- minus 30 degrees, for any firing angle greater than that, the vehicle must turn itself.

There were two versions designed: the **Zrínyi I**, equipped with a 75 mm. gun and the **Zrínyi II** with a 105 mm. Howitzer. Unfortunately there were very few **Zrínyi I** units produced because the manufacturing facility at Csepel that was supposed to produce this unit was destroyed by Allied bombing. The **Zrínyi II** was probably the most effective weapon the Hungarian Army had on the field, its 105 mm. Howitzer was devastating on the enemy infantry at close range.

By early 1944 there were eight Assault Artillery battalions raised, each having 30 **Zrínyi II** assault guns. The cadre was formed from the existing field artillery units. All of these units fought with great distinction as some of the finest elite units of the Hungarian Army.

### APPENDIX III

#### CSABA model 39M armored car



In service : 1940-1945

No. manufactured: 137

Armor: 7-13 mm.

Primary Weaponry: 1- 20 mm. autocannon

Secondary weaponry: 1- 8 mm. machine gun

Weight: 5.95 metric ton (6.5 ton US)

Speed: 65 km/h (41 mph)

#### **In action**

The first 61 39M vehicles equipped the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Brigades, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Divisions and the First Mountain Brigade. A squadron consisted of 10 vehicles, one command 40M and two training vehicles. The section of a mountain brigade consisted of three 39Ms. Except for the mountain brigades, the aforementioned units participated in Operation Barbarossa.



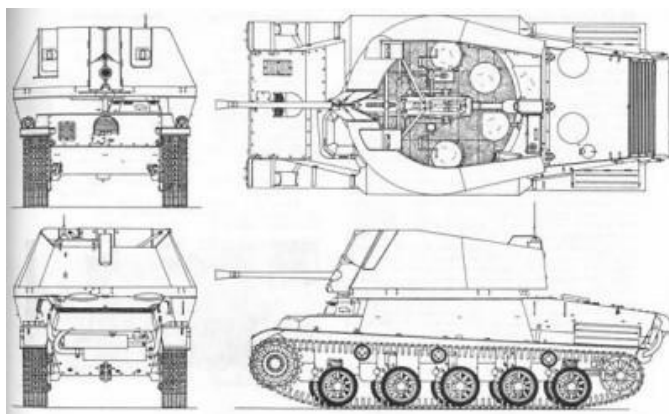
December 1942, on the Don, the first Cavalry Brigade lost almost all its vehicle, 18 Csabas in all. In April 1944, the second Armored Division counted 14 armored cars and was transferred to the Eastern front in August, but over 12 Csabas returned home. By the summer of 1944 the Army

In December 1941, these units were reorganized and brought back from the front, with only 17 surviving Csabas. Combat experience showed that the weaponry and armor protection were insufficient for anything but reconnaissance. In



was left with 48 combat-ready armored vehicles. Four Csabas formed a section, of which one was a command one. These sections were assigned to four Hungarian infantry divisions. In June 1944, these sections fought in Galicia with the cavalry divisions, with 8 out of 14 returning from the fight. From the autumn 1944 their numbers gradually decreased. None seem to have survived the war.

### APPENDIX III



#### **NIMRÓD model 36/40M self propelled AA gun**

In service : 1941-1945

No. manufactured: 135

Armor: 6-13 mm.

Primary Weaponry: 1- 40 mm. autocannon

Weight: 11 metric ton (12 ton US)

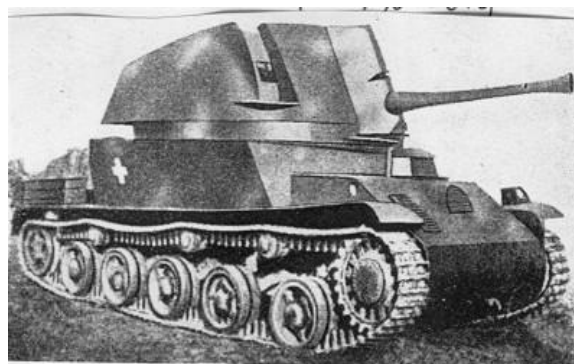
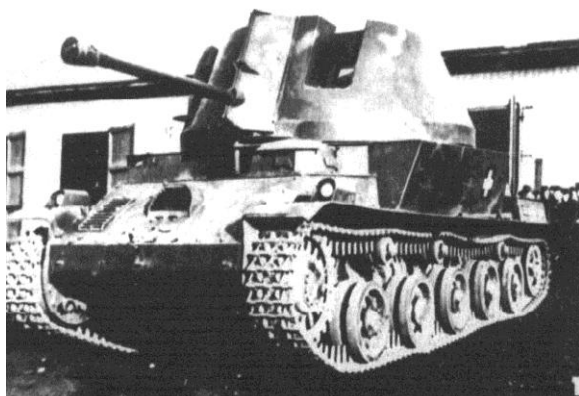
Speed: 46.5 km/h (29 mph)

#### **The 40M in action**

In 1943, the 40M Nimród was reclassified for anti-aircraft use only, as they were found unable to pierce the armor of the T-34 and KV-1 tanks. Tactically, these vehicles were deployed in batteries attached to armored and motorized battalions, with six vehicles each, sub-divided into three platoons. These units were:

- 51<sup>st</sup> Heavy Armor Battalion, 1st Hungarian Armored Division
- 52<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Armor Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Armored Division
- 1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian Cavalry Division

Ref: [http://www.tanks-encyclopedia.com/ww2/hungary/40M\\_Nimrod.php](http://www.tanks-encyclopedia.com/ww2/hungary/40M_Nimrod.php)



## APPENDIX III

### **TOLDI I (A20) light tank**

In service : 1940-1945

No. manufactured: 280

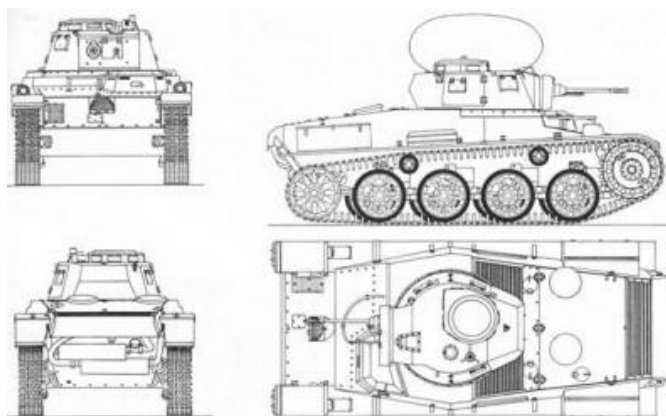
Armor: 5-13 mm.

Primary Weaponry: 1- 20 mm. heavy gun.

Secondary weaponry: 1- 8 mm. machine gun

Weight: 8.5 metric tons (9.7 US tons)

Speed: 50 km/h (31 mph)



### **TOLDI II (B-20) and IIa (B-40) light tank**

In service : 1940-1945

No. manufactured: 80

Armor: 5-35 mm.

Primary Weaponry:

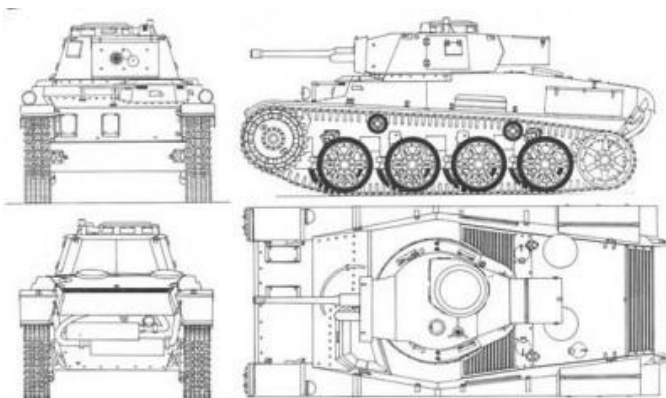
(Toldi II) 1- 20 mm. heavy gun,

(Toldi IIa) 1- 40 mm. heavy gun

Secondary weaponry: 1- 8 mm. machine gun.

Weight: 9.1 metric ton, 10 ton US

Speed: 46 km/h (29 mph)



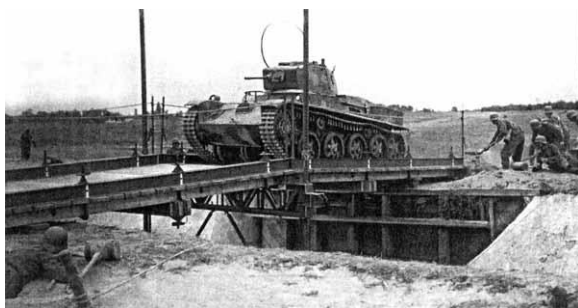


### The Toldi in action

Compared to the original design, the Toldi was faster, more agile and nimbler, with good off-road performances and a powerful and reliable radio set. They were used as frontline tanks, in light armored brigades or fast motorized ones. Some Toldi Is participated in the Yugoslavian campaign of April 1941, seizing the Bánát province of Bácska, thus adding this new territory to the Kingdom, but the tanks were not seriously tested. However, in the summer of 1941, all the might of the Carpathian Army Group was committed to Operation Barbarossa. It was engaged in harsh frontier battles, most Toldi tanks being part of the Mobile Corps (1<sup>st</sup> Motorized, 2<sup>nd</sup> Motorized and 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Brigades). Their main opponents were the **T-26** and **BT** tanks, lightly armored, but equipped with 37 mm (1.46 in) guns.

They fought at Nikolayev, south of Kharkov, together with the German 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division and SS-Leibstandarte Brigade. By early 1942, a considerable force was gathered, including the III Corps, IV Corps and VII Corps, composed of various light divisions, all equipped with armored cars and Toldis I and II, along with the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Field Division. More frequent encounters with **T-34** tanks led to the Toldi IIa. But the increase in armament did not compensate for the lack of protection, and, during the upcoming battles, from Voronezh to the Don, many more were lost.

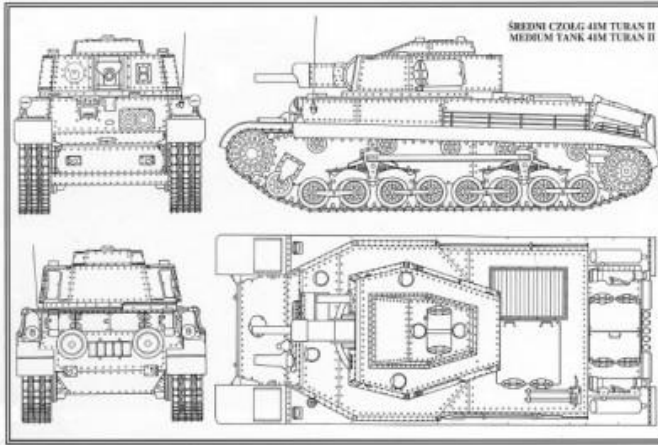
By that time, from mid-1942, most surviving Toldi tanks were used exclusively for reconnaissance. They fought at Uryw and Karotyak, and light units were resupplied with Škoda-built **Panzer 38(t)s**. Unfortunately, the latter were even less prepared for the bitter cold of the winter 1942-43. Moreover, after the storming Soviet counter-



offensive of January 1943, the Hungarian forces, exhausted and short on ammo, took crippling losses and were evacuated to the rear, as well as the remaining Toldis. They would see no more action until mid to late 1944. The only surviving vehicles were captured by the Soviets, and now displayed at the Kubinka museum.

Ref: [http://www.tanks-encyclopedia.com/ww2/hungary/Toldi\\_Tank.php](http://www.tanks-encyclopedia.com/ww2/hungary/Toldi_Tank.php)

### APPENDIX III



#### **TURÁN I (40M), II (41M) light tank**

In service : 1940-1945

No. manufactured: 285 (I), 139 (II)

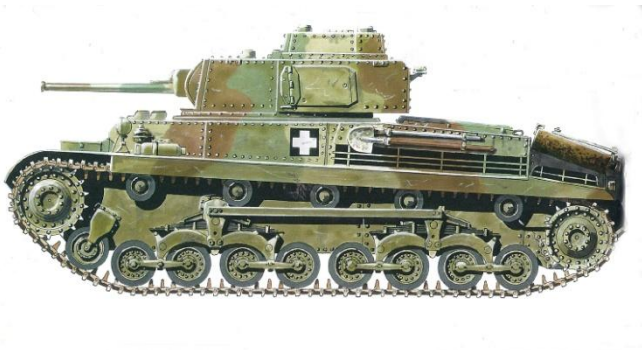
Armor: 13-50 mm.

Primary Weaponry: 1- 40 mm. (I),  
1- 75 mm. (II), tank gun.

Secondary weaponry: 2- 8 mm. machine gun

Weight: 18.2 metric ton (20 ton US) (I)  
19.2 metric ton (21 ton US) (II)

Speed: 47 km/h (29 mph) (I),  
45 km/h (28 mph) (II)



Ref: [http://www.tanks-encyclopedia.com/ww2/hungary/40M\\_Turan.php](http://www.tanks-encyclopedia.com/ww2/hungary/40M_Turan.php)

#### **The Turán in action**

All the Turán I/II's built were used by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Armored Divisions, but also the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. They saw their first operational commitment early on in 1944, in Galicia, where they were seriously outclassed by Russian **T-34s** and **IS-1/2s**. Even though the Turán II received an upgrade in its armament with the 75mm tank gun, which was capable of piercing the T-34's armor, it was still an uneven match for them. However, the superior dedication, tactical skills and heroism of the Hungarian armored troops took heavy toll on the Russian armor despite the shortcomings of their own tanks. When the campaign was over in February 1945, there were still some remaining Hungarian tanks to be captured. The only one still in existence today is displayed at the Kubinka museum near Moscow.





## **ZRÍNYI II (40M) assault gun**

In service : 1943-45

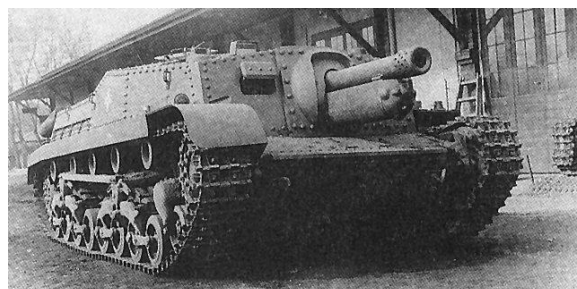
No. manufactured: 66

Armor: 13-75 mm.

Primary Weaponry: 1- 105 mm. howitzer.

Weight: 22.4 metric ton (24 ton US) with full ammo complement

Speed: 43 km/h (27 mph)



### **The Zrínyi II in action**

It was hoped to form similar units to the German four-vehicle batteries at the armored division level, but there were never enough vehicles for this. They were deployed with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Rohamtüzér Osztály* (assault battalions), and mostly soldiered in Galicia in the summer of 1944, against a massive Soviet offensive. They proved to be worthy opponents of the mighty T-34s. After surviving forces retreated from Transylvania by September-October 1944, some were captured and used for some time by Romanian troops. One was later confiscated by the Red Army and is now on display at the Kubinka museum.



## APPENDIX IV – HUNGARIAN AIR FORCE

Under the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Hungary was forbidden from owning military aircraft. However, a secret air arm was gradually established under the cover of civilian flying clubs. During 1938, as a result of the Bled agreement<sup>101</sup>, the existence of the Royal Hungarian Air Force (Hungarian: *Magyar Királyi Honvéd Légierő* (MKHL)), was made known. The army's aviation service was reorganized and expanded.

Late 1938 the army aviation was once again reorganized. Admiral Horthy, the head of state, ordered that the army aviation should become an independent service effective January 9, 1939. Colonel Ferenc Feketealmi Czeydner became the Air Section Chief in the Honvéd Ministry; Major General Waldemar Kenese became Inspector of the Air Force; Colonel Ferenc Szentnémedy became Chief-of-Staff, and Colonel László Hány was appointed head of the *Magyar Királyi Honvéd Légierő* (MKHL).

It subsequently participated in clashes with the newly established Slovak Republic and in the border confrontation with the Kingdom of Romania. In April 1941, operations were conducted in support of the German invasion of Yugoslavia and, on 27 June 1941, Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union.

In 1940, the decision was made to unite the Air Force, the anti-aircraft forces, and the civilian air defense organizations under one central headquarters. Colonel László Hány was retired Dec 24, 1940, and on March 1, 1941 the new organization was constituted. General András Littay became Air Sub-Department Chief, and Colonel Géza Vörös was appointed Head of the Air General Staff. On June 1, 1941, the Air Defense Corps was established, and Lieutenant General Béla Rákosi became Commander of Army Aviation. In effect the Air Force had once again become part of the Army.

The Royal Hungarian Air Force quickly found itself fighting on the Eastern Front with the Red Army Air Force. At the time some units were starting to retire their old FIAT CR-32 and CR-42 biplanes, with the replacement of another Italian fighter – the Reggiane Re-2000 named *Héja* in the Hungarian usage. Also another Italian make, Caproni Ca-135 bombers were used.

The heavy fighting on the Eastern Front took its toll on the Hungarians, with many of their original aircraft being shot down in fierce fights over Ukraine. However, Germany quickly set about rearming its ally – in October 1942, most units were reinforced with new German aircraft – He-170, and Me-109 F-4 fighters, Ju-87 dive bombers, Ju-86 and Ju-88 bombers, Fw-190 and Me-210 heavy fighters.

The Me-109s were later upgraded to the G-2, and finally the G-6 version as the war progressed. Beginning March 1944, the Hungarians had to not only fight in the USSR, but also defend their own country from progressively increasing intense US bombing raids, aimed at Hungarian industry. Hungarian fighter pilots were instrumental in downing a number of Allied bombers and fighter planes. The top scoring ace of the Hungarian Air Force, Dezső Szentgyörgyi, ended the war with 29 confirmed victories, 6 of which against US aircraft.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The **Bled agreement** of 22 August 1938 revoked some of the restrictions placed on Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon for its involvement on the losing side in World War I. Representatives of Hungary and three of its neighbors—the so-called "Little Entente" of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia—first met at Bled in Yugoslavia on 21 August. The next day they announced a joint renunciation of the use of force in their mutual relations, and the Little Entente recognized Hungary as having an equal right to armaments. This gave Hungary legal cover for the re-creation of its air force, already begun in secret, and the increase of its army in manpower, guns and munitions.  
Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bled\\_agreement\\_\(1938\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bled_agreement_(1938))

<sup>102</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian\\_Air\\_Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Air_Force); and  
<https://warthunder.com/en/news/874-Air-Forces-The-Hungarian-Air-Force-en/>

## Caproni Ca-135

### Specifications:

#### General characteristics:

- **Crew:** 4/5
- **Length:** 14.38 m (47 ft 2 in)
- **Wingspan:** 18.80 m (61 ft 8 in)
- **Power plant:** 2 × Piaggio P.XI R.C.40 14-cyl.

two-row air-cooled radial piston engines, 746 kW (1,000 hp) each

#### Performance:

- **Maximum speed:** 365 km/h (227 mph; 197 kn) at 4,800 m (15,748 ft)
- **Cruise speed:** 349 km/h; 189 kn (217 mph)
- **Range:** 1,199 km; 647 mi (745 mi) to 1,242 mi (1,999 km)
- **Service ceiling:** 6,500 m (21,325 ft)

#### Armament:

- **Guns:** 3 x 12.7 mm (0.500 in) Breda-SAFAT machine gun
- **Bombs:** 1,474 kg (3,250 lb)

The *Magyar Királyi Honvéd Légierő* (MKHL; the Royal Hungarian Air Force) ordered the

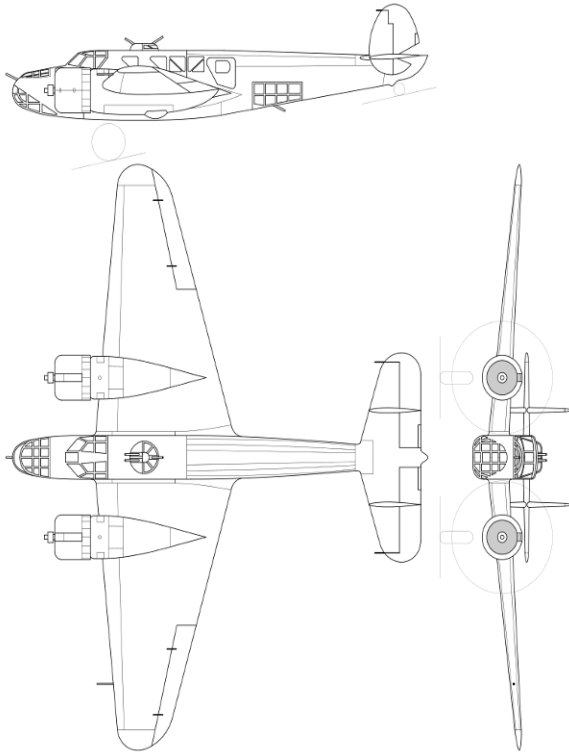
Caproni in 1940 and 1942, delivered in two series of 36 resp. 31 planes. Also a license production of aircraft and engines was considered.

With the purchase of the Italian Caproni bomber the *Bombázó Osztály 4./I* (Bomber Group 4./I) replaced the German Junkers Ju-86K-9 for the period of late 1940 to June 1941 at Debrecen where it was added to Bomber Group 4./IV establishing the IV Bomber Regiment. The Hungarian Air Force kept the Caproni bomber in use until 1942 when it was replaced and phased out by the German Junkers Ju-88.

The Hungarians operated a total of 67 Ca-135s with some success against the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front in 1941 and 1942, once Hungary had committed its forces in that sector during World War II.

These aircraft constituted almost the entire Hungarian heavy bomber force. Unfortunately, the aircraft suffered from many technical shortcomings, such as collapsing landing gear, and high maintenance, as well as insufficient bomb load capacity. At the best efforts of the ground crew, only 50% of the fleet was ever operational. Even with this handicap, in Hungarian service this bomber proved quite satisfactory.

These bombers entered in action on 11 August, when six Capronis, commanded by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt.



A Ca-135 of the Hungarian Air Force in 1942.



**A Hungarian Air Force Ca-135 being loaded with bombs, 1942.**

Szakonyi, took off to bomb a 2 km (6,560 ft) bridge across the Bug River of the city of Nikolayev, on the Black sea. One Ca-135 had to turn back due to engine problems, but the other five, escorted by Hungarian Fiat CR-42s and Reggiane Re-2000s, continued eastwards. Szakonyi's Caproni was hit by AA fire and lost his port engine but the squadron commander remained in action. One of his pilots, Capt. Eszényi, destroyed the bridge, and Szakonyi bombed the Nikolayev train station. On the way back the Capronis were intercepted by Soviet Polikarpov I-16 fighters. The escorting

Hungarian fighters shot down five I-16, while the crippled Szakonyi's Ca-135 managed to destroy another three Polikarpovs. After the German 11<sup>th</sup> Army captured Nikolayev, on 16 August, the commander of *Luftflotte* 4, Col Gen Lohr, decorated the successful Hungarian crews at Sutyska.

One of the squadrons, the I/4, (originally equipped with eight aircraft), soon lost one on landing. It was replaced by another four aircraft. This squadron, up to October 1941, carried out 265 attacks, flew 1,040 sorties, and dropped around 1,450 tonnes (1,600 tons) of bombs, evidently helped by the short range (200–300 km/120-190 mi) that allowed them to use the aircraft's maximum bomb load. Two aircraft were shot down, another two were lost in accidents and 11 crewmen were killed. The daily average, over these four months, was over 8 missions flown and 13 tonnes (14 tons) of bombs dropped.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caproni\\_Ca.135](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caproni_Ca.135), and <http://www.wv2incolor.com/hungary/CA135-HAF-INC.html>

## FIAT CR-32

### Specifications

#### General characteristics:

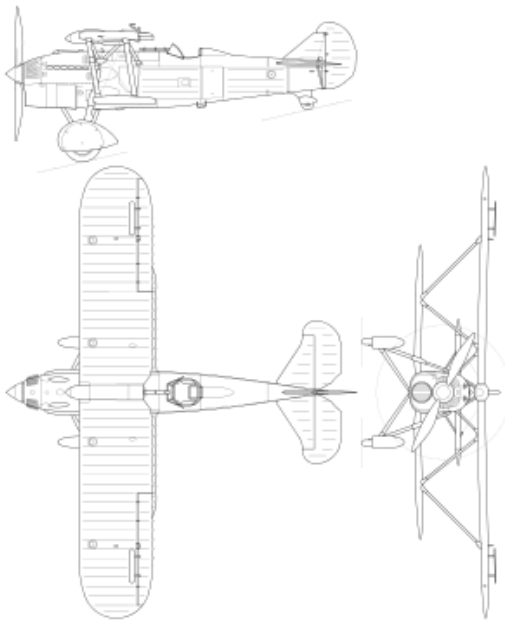
- **Crew:** 1
- **Length:** 7.47 m (24 ft 6 in)
- **Wingspan:** 9.5 m (31 ft 2.25 in)
- **Power plant:** 1 × Fiat A30 RA-bis V12, 447 kW (600 hp)

#### Performance:

- **Maximum speed:** 360 km/h (224 mph)
- **Range:** 781 km (485 mi)
- **Service ceiling:** 8,800 m (28,870 ft)

#### Armament:

- **Guns:** 2 × 7.7 mm (.303 in) or 12.7 mm (.5 in) Breda-SAFAT machine guns
- **Bombs:** Up to 100 kg (220 lb)



The Fiat CR-32 was an Italian biplane fighter used in the Spanish Civil War and World War II. It was compact, robust and highly maneuverable. The *Magyar Királyi Honvéd Légierő*, the Royal Hungarian Air Force (MKHL), acquired a total of 76 CR-32's in 1935 and 1936. MKHL Fiat biplanes had their baptism of fire in 1939, during the short conflict with the new state of Slovakia. The

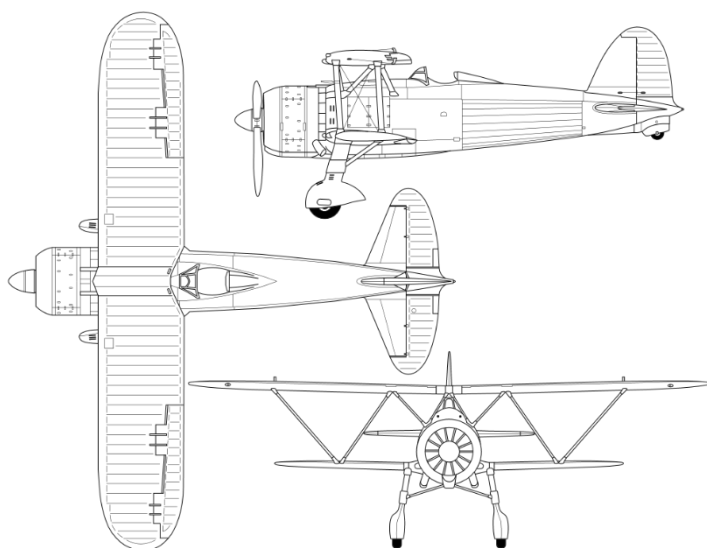


CR-32s, with the red/white/green chevrons insignia, easily gained air superiority over the new Slovak Air Force. When, in June 1941, the kingdom of Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union, there were two units of CR-32 fighters that supported the Hungarian Army on the Eastern Front: 1./I Group of 1st Fighter Wing, based in Szolnok, and 2./I Group, of 2nd Fighter Wing, based at Nyíregyháza. On 29 June, the first aerial combat over Hungary took place, when seven Tupolev SB-2 bombers attacked the railway station at Csap and

were intercepted by the Fiat CR-32s from 2/3 Fighter squadron. The Fiat biplanes shot down three of the raiders, for no loss to themselves.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiat\\_CR.32](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiat_CR.32)





## FIAT CR-42

### Specifications

#### General characteristics:

- **Crew:** 1
- **Length:** 8.25 m (27 ft 1 in)
- **Wingspan:**
  - **Top wing:** 9.70 m (31 ft 10 in)
  - **Bottom wing:** 6.50 m (21 ft 4 in)
- **Power plant:** 1 × Fiat A.74 RC38 radial air-cooled, fourteen cylinders radial engine, 627 kW (840 hp at 2,400 r.p.m./12,500 ft)

#### Performance:

- **Maximum speed:** 441 km/h (238 kn, 274 mph) at 20,000 ft
- **Cruise speed:** 399 km/h (215 kn, 248

mph)

- **Range:** 780 km (420 nmi, 485 mi)
- **Service ceiling:** 10,210 m (33,500 ft)

Ar-

#### ament:

- **Guns:** First series : Breda SAFAT 7.7 mm (0.303 in)  
 Later 2 × 12.7 mm (0.5 in) Breda SAFAT machine guns, 400 rpg.  
 2 × 12.7 mm (.5 in) machine-guns in underwing fairing on some.
- **Bombs:** 200 kg (440 lb) on 2 × wing hardpoints

The Fiat CR-42 Falco was a single-seat sesquiplane fighter that served primarily in Italy's Regia Aeronautica before and during World War II.

The CR-42's first foreign purchaser was the Royal Hungarian Air Force (MKHL), which placed orders for 52 aircraft in mid-1938. The Hungarians, while aware that the CR-42 was conceptually outdated, considered the rapid re-equipment of their fighter component vital, the Italian government having expressed its willingness to forgo CR-42 delivery positions in order to expedite the re-equipment of Hungarian units. By the end of 1939, 17 CR-42s had reached Hungary, issued to 1. *Vadász Ezred* (1st Fighter Wing) which began conversion from the CR-32. Its two groups of two squadrons, 1./I *Vadász Osztály* (Fighter Group) at Szolnok and the 1./II *Vadász Osztály* at Mátyásföld, Budapest, received their full complement of fighters in mid-1940.

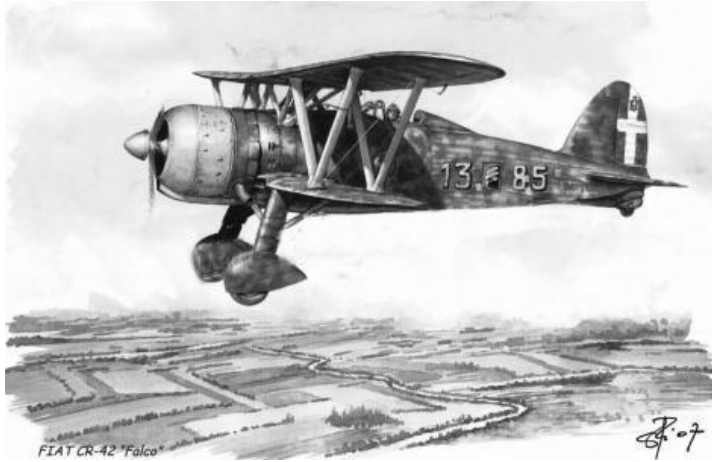
Some CR-42s in Hungarian service were fitted with a 12.7 mm (.5 in) Gebauer GKM Machine Gun 1940.M (*Gebauer Kényszermeghajtású Motorgéppuska*, or "Gebauer Positive-Driven Motor-Machine Gun"); these were fixed twin-barrel guns driven from the aircraft engine's crankshaft.

In total, the MKHL ordered 70 CR-42s but through a barter, which included a captured Yugoslavian Savoia-Marchetti SM.79, they received two additional CR-42s in 1941. The Hungarian CR-42s were first used against Yugoslavia, in April 1941. During the short conflict in the Balkans the MKHL lost two CR-42s.

On 27 June 1941, when Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union, the CR-42s equipped three MKHL units: 1./I Group, based in Szolnok, 1./II Group, at Mátyásföld, of 1st Fighter Wing, and 2./II Group, based in Kolozsvár, of 2nd Fighter Wing.<sup>[51]</sup> On the same day Hungarian CR-42s had their baptism of fire, when 2/3. Squadron escorted bombers against Stanislaw. Ensign László Kázár was hit by Soviet anti-aircraft fire while strafing and crash landed behind enemy lines. On the same day, Sergeant Árpád Kertész, from the same unit, claimed the first victory, shooting down a

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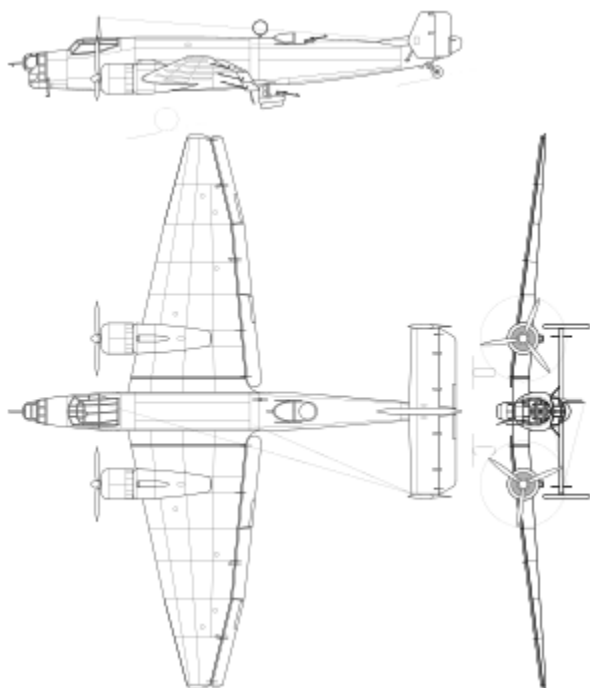
Soviet reconnaissance plane. The 2/3. Squadron flew many sorties until the middle of July escorting bombers and strafing enemy airfields. They claimed six additional kills, losing one plane on 12 July, when 2nd Lieutenant Győző Vámos engaged in a dogfight with a Polikarpov I-16 and bailed out, surviving. On 11 August, Hungarian Fiats escorted six Caproni Ca-135s, commanded by 1st Lt Szakonyi, on their way to bomb a 2 km (6,560 ft) bridge across the Bug River in the city of Nikola-



yevev, on the Black sea. On the way back the Capronis were intercepted by Soviet Polikarpov I-16 fighters. The escorting Hungarian CR-42s shot down five I-16s, with no own losses. After the German 11th Army captured Nikolayev on 16 August the commander of Luftflotte 4, Col Gen Lohr, decorated the successful Hungarian crews at Sutyska. The Hungarian CR-42s were later used in the ground attack role against Soviet forces until December 1941. Although typically outclassed by more modern types, the Hungarian CR-42s scored 25 destroyed,

one probable, one damaged (according to other sources they claimed 24 plus two Soviet planes in the air) and one aircraft destroyed on the ground, losing two planes to Soviet fighters. The surviving CR-42s were relegated to training roles. In spring 1944 a night assault CR-42 Squadron was formed. The aircraft were equipped with flame dampers and bomb racks for four 50 kg bombs, but reportedly these planes were not used operationally. Most of CR-42s were lost in training accidents and strafing attacks by U.S. aircraft in 1944. Not a single Hungarian *Falco* survived the war.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiat\\_CR-42](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiat_CR-42)



## Junkers Ju-86

### Specifications:<sup>106</sup>

#### General characteristics:

- **Crew:** 2 (pilot and radio operator)
- **Length:** 16.46 m (54 ft)
- **Wingspan:** 32 m (105 ft)
- **Powerplant:** 2 × Junkers Jumo 207B-3/V diesel engines, 746 kW (1,000 hp) each

#### Performance:

- **Maximum speed:** 420 km/h (260 mph) above 9,150 m (30,000 ft)
- **Range:** 1,580 km (980 mi)
- **Service ceiling:** 13,000 m (42,650 ft)

#### Armament

- **Guns:** defensive armament of three MG 15 machine guns
- **Bombs:** 1,000 kg (2,200 lb) of bombs

The Junkers Ju-86 was a German monoplane bomber and civilian airliner designed in the early 1930s, and employed by both sides during World War II. The civilian model Ju-86B could carry 10 passengers. There were 66 Ju-86K-2 aircraft built for Hungary.<sup>107</sup>



Ju-86 K-2 of Royal Hungarian Air Force

Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers\\_Ju\\_86](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_86)

<sup>106</sup> Data from Jane's Fighting Aircraft of World War I, and Warbirds Resource Group

<sup>107</sup> Ref: <http://www.warbirdsresourcegroup.org/LRG/ju86.html>

## Junkers Ju-87 Stuka

### Specifications<sup>108</sup>

#### General characteristics:

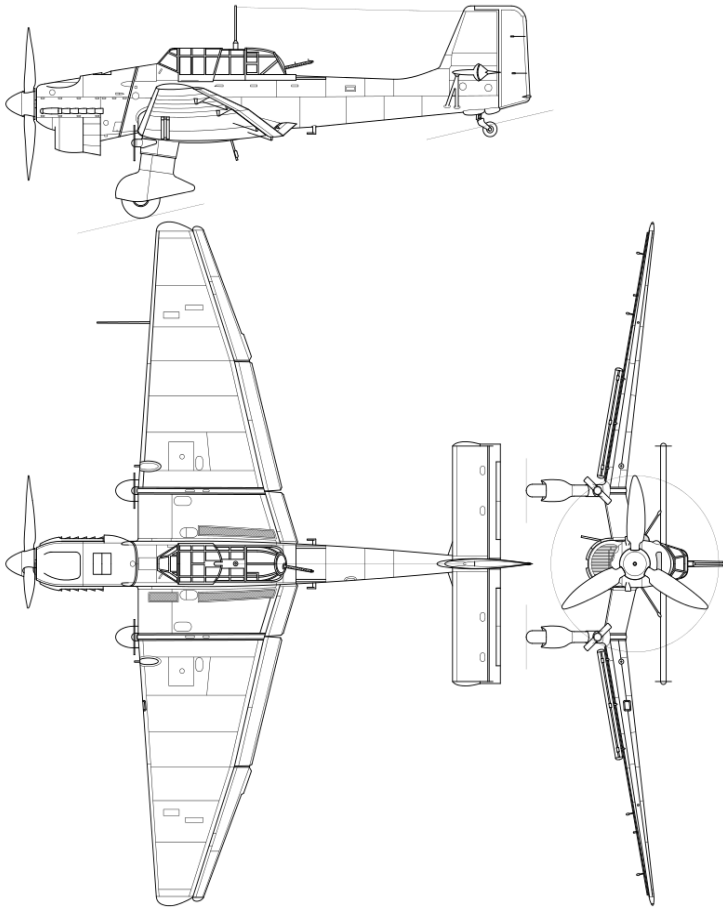
- **Crew:** 2
- **Length:** 11.00 m (36 ft 1.07 in)
- **Wingspan:** 13.8 m (45 ft 3.30 in)
- **Powerplant:** 1 × Junkers Jumo 211D liquid-cooled inverted V12 engine, 1200 PS (1,184 hp (883 kW))

#### Performance:

- **Never exceed speed:** 600 km/h (373 mph) (373 mph)
- **Maximum speed:** 390 km/h @ 4,400 m (242 mph @ 13,410 ft)
- **Range:** 500 km (311 mi) with 500 kg (1,100 lb) bomb load
- **Service ceiling:** 8,200 m (26,903 ft) with 500 kg (1,100 lb) bomb load

#### Armament:

- **Guns:** 2× 7.92 mm (.312 in) MG 17 machine gun forward, 1× 7.92 mm (.312 in) MG 15 machine gun to rear
- **Bombs:** Normal load = 1× 250 kg (550 lb) bomb beneath the fuselage and 4× 50 kg (110 lb), two bombs underneath each wing.



**Stuka**, German in full *Sturzkampfflugzeug* (“dive-bomber”), a low-wing, single-engine mono-plane—especially the Junkers Ju-87 dive-bomber—used by the German Luftwaffe from 1937 to 1945, with especially telling effect during the first half of World War II. The Stuka was designed to employ the dive-bombing technique developed earlier by the U.S. Navy—i.e., diving on the target at a steep angle and releasing the bombs at low altitude for maximum accuracy before breaking away. The Ju-87 had dive brakes to slow the dive and give the pilot more time to aim his airplane and, thereby, the bomb. It also had hinged external bomb racks that could, when the craft was in a steep dive, swing

downward and outward so that the bombs, when released, would clear the airplane’s propellers. The Ju-87 was armed with four 7.9-millimeter machine guns, two of which were operated by a rear-seat gunner; late in the war, the rear-mounted guns were replaced by a single 13-millimeter gun. The Stuka carried under its fuselage either one 1,100-pound (500-kilogram) or one 550-pound (250-kilogram) bomb, plus two smaller bombs (110 pounds [50 kg]) under each wing. The craft was first used by German pilots in the Spanish Civil War and then in the invasions of Poland, the Low Countries, and France. Wind-driven sirens were mounted on the fixed landing gear for psychological ef-

<sup>108</sup> Data from Ju-87 B-2 Betriebsanleitung, Juni 1940 (D.(Luft) T.2335/1)

#### APPENDIX IV



fect, and this effect was enhanced by the addition of cardboard sirens to the bombs. Although the Stukas, refined from time to time, were used throughout the war, their maximum speed was just 210 miles per hour (335 km per hour), and they proved no match for the British combination of early warning by radar and fast fighter planes.<sup>109</sup>

Italy's Regia Aeronautica received a number of the B-2s and named them the "Picchiatello", while others went to the other members of the Axis, including Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

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<sup>109</sup> Ref: <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Stuka>

## Junkers Ju-88

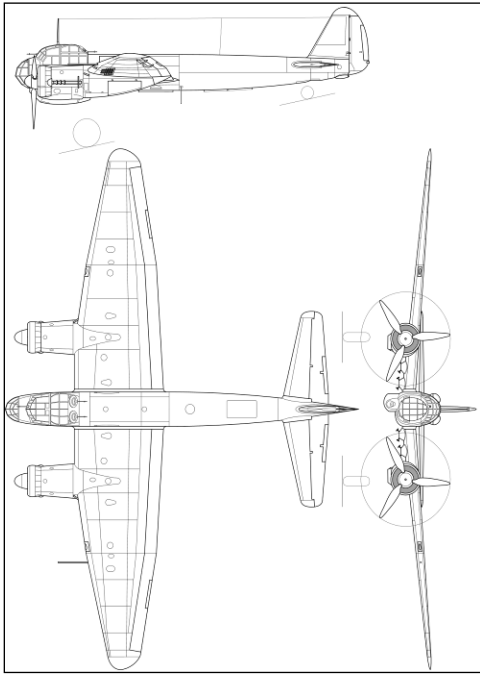
### Specifications Ju-88 A-4

#### General characteristics

- **Crew:** 4 (pilot, bombardier/front gunner, radio operator/rear gunner, navigator/ventral gunner)
- **Length:** 14.36 m (47 ft 2<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in)
- **Wingspan:** 20.08 m (65 ft 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in)
- **Height:** 5.07 m (16.63 ft)
- **Powerplant:** 2 × Junkers Jumo 211J<sup>[69]</sup> liquid-cooled inverted V-12, 1,044 kW (1,420 PS, 1,401 hp) each

#### Performance

- **Maximum speed:** 510 km/h<sup>[68]</sup> (317 mph) at 5,300 m (17,389 ft) without external bomb racks or 433 km/h (269 mph) at 4,500 m (14,765 ft) at 14,000 kg (30,865 lb)
- **Range:** 2,430 km<sup>[68]</sup> (1,429 mi) maximum internal fuel
- **Service ceiling:** 9,000 m (29,500 ft) at average weight, without bombs.



#### Armament

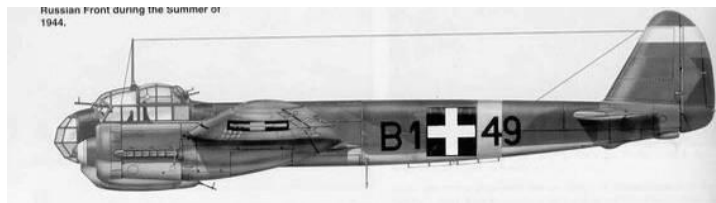
- **Guns:**
  - 1 × 7.92 mm MG 81J machine gun on flexible mount in front windscreen, firing forward with 1,000 rounds.<sup>[N 4]</sup>
  - 1 × 7.92 mm MG 81J machine gun on flexible mount in lower fuselage nose glazing, firing forward with 1,000 rounds.
  - 2 × 7.92 mm MG 81J machine guns on flexible mount in the rear of the cockpit
- 1 × 7.92 mm MG 81Z twin machine gun on flexible mount in the rear ventral *Bola* position, firing aft with 1,000 rounds.<sup>[68][70]</sup>
- **Bombs:** Up to 1,400 kilograms (3,100 lb) of ordnance internally in two bomb bays rated at 900 kg (2,000 lb) and 500 kg (1,100 lb) or up to 3,000 kg (6,600 lb) externally.

Many options of armament and bomb load.



The Royal Hungarian Air Force received a number of these bombers, and used them with great effectiveness..

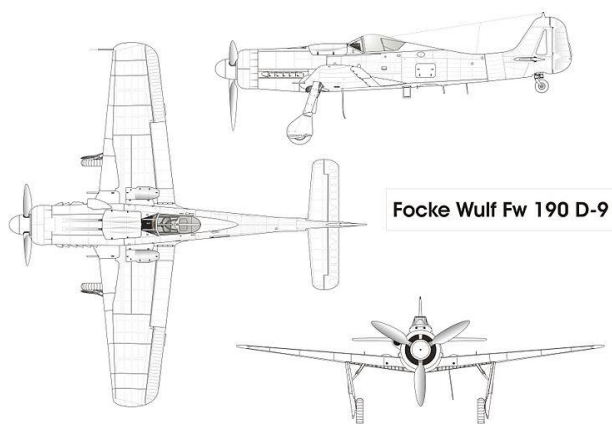
Despite its protracted development, the aircraft became one of the *Luftwaffe's* most important assets. The assembly line ran constantly from 1936 to 1945, and more than 16,000 Ju-88s were built in dozens of variants, more than any other twin-engine German aircraft of the period. Throughout the production, the basic structure of the aircraft remained unchanged.<sup>110</sup>



A Ju-88A-4 bomber of 102/1 Bomber Squadron, Hung Air Force. The aircraft served on the Russian front during the summer of 1944.

<sup>110</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers\\_Ju-88](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju-88)





## Focke Wulf Fw-190

### Specifications (Fw-190 D-9)

#### General characteristics

- **Crew:** 1
- **Length:** 10.20 m (33 ft 5½ in)
- **Wingspan:** 10.50 m (34 ft 5 in)
- **Powerplant:** 1 × Junkers Jumo 213A 12-cylinder inverted-Vee piston engine, 1,287 kW (1,750 PS, 1,726 hp) or 1,508 kW (2,050 PS, 2,022 hp) with boost (model 213E)

#### Armament:

- **Guns:** (all synchronized to fire through propeller arc)
  - 2 × 13 mm (.51 in) MG 131 machine guns with 475 rpg
  - 2 × 20 mm MG 151 cannons with 250 rpg in the wing root
- **Bombs:** 1 × 500 kg (1,102 lb) SC 500 bomb (optional)

#### Performance:

- **Maximum speed:** 685 km/h (426 mph) at 6,600 m (21,655 ft), 710 km/h (440 mph) at 11,000 m (36,000 ft)
- **Range:** 835 km (519 mi)
- **Service ceiling:** 12,000 m (39,370 ft)



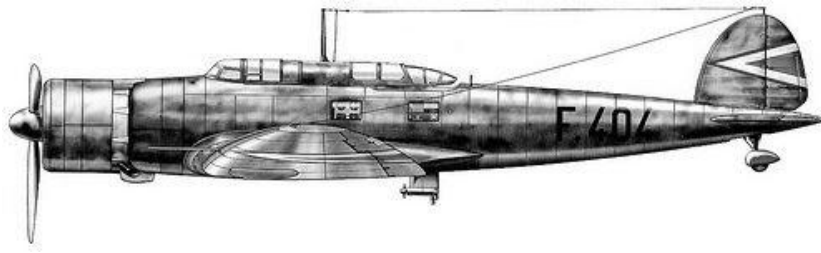
*Jagdwaffe* (Fighter Force). The twin-row BMW 801 radial engine that powered most operational versions enabled the Fw-190 to lift larger loads than the Me-109, allowing its use as a day fighter, fighter-bomber, ground-attack aircraft and, to a lesser degree, night fighter.

Primary users: Royal Hungarian Air Force

Royal Hungarian Air Force received a total of 72 Fw-190F-8s starting in the November 1944. They were operated by the 102. *Vadászbombázó Század*, later 102. *Csatarepülő Osztály* (102nd Fighter-Bomber Squadron, later Wing) engaging in close-support missions on the Eastern Front in 1944–45.<sup>111</sup>



<sup>111</sup> Ref. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focke-Wulf\\_Fw\\_190](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focke-Wulf_Fw_190)



## Heinkel He-170

### Specifications<sup>112</sup>

#### General characteristics

- **Crew:** 3 (pilot, radio operator and dorsal gunner)
- **Length:** 11.70 m (38 ft  $\frac{3}{4}$  in)
- **Wingspan:** 14.80 m (48 ft  $6\frac{3}{4}$  in)

- **Height:** 3.10 m (10 ft 2 in)
- **Powerplant:** 1 × Gnome-Rhone 14K Mistral-Major, 910 HP

#### Performance

- **Maximum speed:** 360 km/h (224 mph)
- **Range:** 2,100 km (1,135 nmi, 1,305 mi)
- **Service ceiling:** 5,300 m (17,400 ft) at sea level, 270 mph at 11,155 ft
- **Cruise speed:** 295 km/h (183 mph)

#### Armament

- **Guns:** Two 7.92 mm machine guns
- **Bombs:** 6 × 50 kg (110 lb) or 24 × 10 kg (22 lb) bombs internally

The Heinkel He-170 was an export version of the military version of the high speed He-70, originally designed as a prestige airline for Lufthansa. It was used by the Royal Hungarian Air Force in early World War II during 1941-42.

The He-170 was very similar to the military versions of the He-70, but with a much more powerful engine. The BMW engine of the He-70 was replaced with a 910 hp Gnome-Rhône 14K Mistral-Major fourteen-cylinder radial air cooled engine, produced under license as the Manfred Weiss WM-K-14. The engine was enclosed in a circular cowling, giving the He-170 a very different



appearance to the 'hunch-nosed' He-70. The new engines raised the top speed of the aircraft from 224 to 270 mph.

The prototype He-170 made its maiden flight in 1937. It was followed by eighteen production aircraft, which were delivered to Hungary in 1937-38, and entered service with I Independent Long-Range Reconnaissance

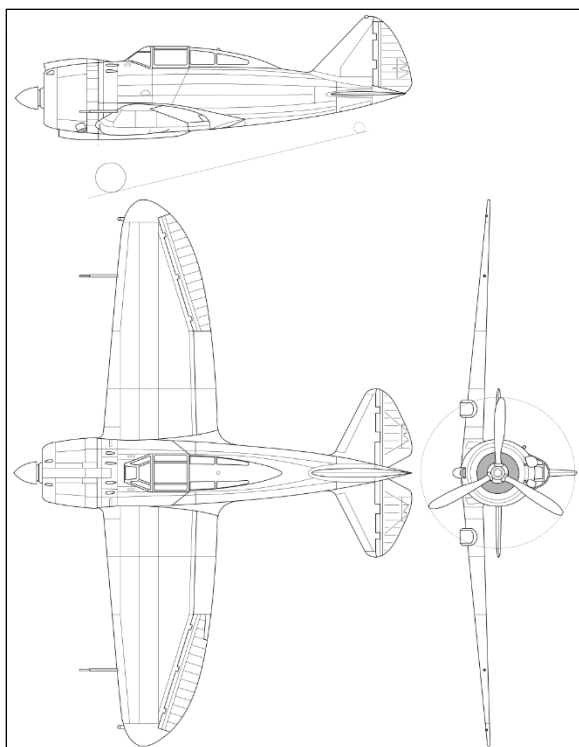
Group in Carpatho-Ruthenia in March 1939.

In the summer of 1941 the Hungarians took part in the German attack on the Soviet Union. The He-170 saw a short period of front line service, starting on 27 June 1941. It quickly became clear that it was not fit for military service even this early in the war on the Eastern Front. It was badly under-armed, with only two machine guns, and the wooden wings were seen as a fire risk. As with the He-70 the elliptical wings and low cockpit room limited its usefulness as a reconnaissance aircraft, and it was withdrawn from the front line in July.<sup>113</sup>

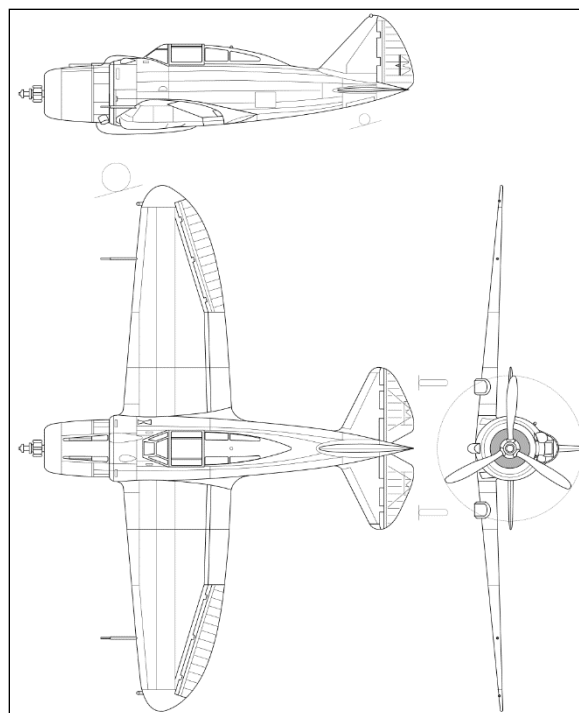
<sup>112</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinkel\\_He\\_70](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinkel_He_70)

<sup>113</sup> [http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/weapons\\_heinkel\\_he\\_170.html](http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/weapons_heinkel_he_170.html)

## APPENDIX IV



**Modified Reggiane Re-2000 for the Hungarian Air Force,  
called MÁVAG Héja I.**



**MÁVAG Héja II.**

## **MÁVAG Héja I and II**

Specifications of MÁVAG Héja <sup>114</sup>		
	<b>Reggiane Re-2000, Héja I</b>	<b>Héja II</b>
Crew	1	1
Length	7.99 m. (26.2 ft)	8.39 m. (27.5 ft)
Wing Span	11 m. (36 ft)	11 m. (36 ft)
Powerplant	986 HP (725 Piaggio P.XI. kW)	Gnome-Rhône (Weiss Manfréd) <u>14kfs Mistral Major</u> . 1030 HP (757 kW)
Max Speed	530 km/h (331 mph)	485 km/h (303 mph)
Range	1400 km (875 mi)	900 km (562.5 mi)
Service ceiling	10,500 m. (34,449 ft)	8138 m (26,700 ft)
Armament	2- 12,7 mm Breda-SAFAT machine gun	2- 12,7 mm Gebauer machine gun

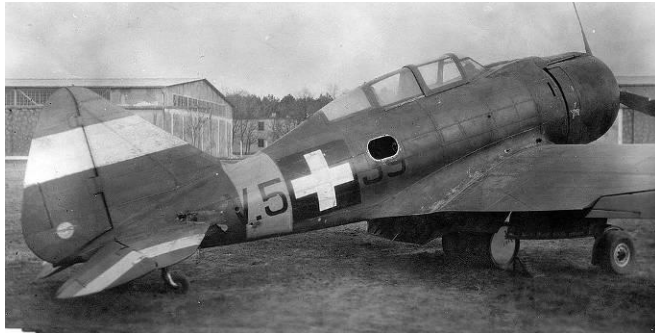
<sup>114</sup> Ref: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%81VAG\\_H%C3%A9ja](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%81VAG_H%C3%A9ja)

## APPENDIX IV

### Design and development

In December 1939 seventy Reggiane Re-2000 fighters, purchased from Italy, were delivered to the *Magyar Királyi Állami Vas-, Acél- és Gépgyárak*, ( MÁVAG - Royal Hungarian State Iron, Steel and Machine Works), where they were modified into **MÁVAG Héja I** ("Goshawk I") fighters. The original Piaggio P.XI engines were replaced by the Hungarian-built Manfred Weiss WM K-14 driving Hamilton Standard three-bladed, constant-speed propellers. The WM K-14 was a licensed copy of the French Gnome-Rhône 14K engine that necessitated a 1-foot 3-inch lengthening of the fighters' forward fuselage, to restore the center of gravity to a safe position. The Piaggio engine was itself also a copy of the Gnome-Rhône 14K, but less reliable than the original.

A decision was soon made to produce more *Héja* fighters under license in Hungary as the **MÁVAG Héja II** (Goshawk II). The new *Héja II* was entirely Hungarian with locally produced airframes, engines and armament. The new fighter differed from the Reggiane fighter in a number of ways. Armament was changed



to twin 0.50 inch (12.7 mm) Gebauer fixed forward-firing guns in the upper nose with 300 rounds each. Length was 27 ft 6.25 inch (8.39 m), and maximum level speed was 301 mph (485 km/h) at 13,780 ft (4,200 m). Endurance was 2 hours and 30 minutes. The first MÁVAG *Héja II* took to the air on 30 October 1942, and in total MÁVAG built a further 203 *Héjas* for the Royal Hungarian Air Force. The last aircraft was completed on 1 August 1944 when production ceased.

### Operational history

The Kingdom of Hungary was allied to Germany during World War II, with at least one Hungarian squadron flying the MÁVAG *Héja* in combat on the Eastern Front. However, most *Héjas* operated inside Hungary in an air defense role or as a trainer.

However, the *Héjas* flight characteristics were markedly different to the Fiat CR-32, from which Hungarian pilots frequently converted. The *Héja* was much more prone to handling difficulties, especially stalls and spins, as well as reliability issues. All the 24 *Héjas* had suffered accidents (minor and major) within a month of combat deployment. Piaggio P.XI engine proved to be a mechanical nightmare for the mechanics. Landing and takeoff accidents were common on the rudimentary Russian airfields and due to the *Héja* not having a rugged landing gear, compared to that of the CR-32. After a steel plate was added behind the cockpit to protect pilots, the shift in the aircraft's center of gravity led to more frequent accidents<sup>115</sup>

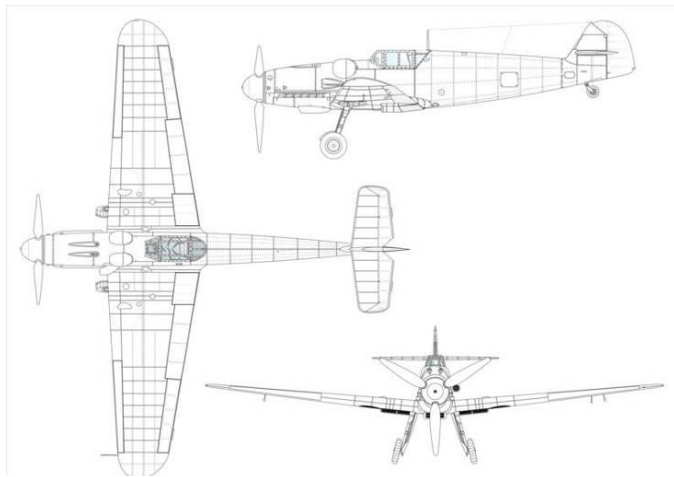
On 20 August 1942, personal tragedy struck the Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy, when 37-year-old István Horthy, Horthy's eldest son, Deputy Regent of Hungary and a Flight Lieutenant in the reserves, was killed while flying *Héja* V.421 of 1/1 Fighter Squadron Royal Hungarian Air Force near Ilovskoye.

In 1943, 98 *Héjas* were produced and another 72 in 1944. They were regarded as no longer suitable for combat against modern Soviet fighters, and should have served as fighter trainers only. The *Luftwaffe* was reluctant to re-equip its Hungarian ally: the deliveries of aircraft went primarily to front-line formations and there was still danger of a Hungarian-Romanian conflict.

The last offensive sortie of the *Héjas* took place on 2 April 1944, when 180 15th Air Force USAAF bombers, escorted by 170 fighters, bombed the Danube Aircraft Works in Budapest and other targets. The Fighter Control Centre dispatched one wing of *Héjas* from 1/1 Fighter squadron, along with a couple of Messerschmitt Me-210Cs and 12 Me-109Gs. The Honvéd pilots claimed 11 American aircraft (six of them confirmed). USAAF pilots reported to have shot down 27 Hungarian aircraft, while only two Hungarians pilots were killed.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggiane\\_Re.2000](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggiane_Re.2000)

<sup>116</sup> Ref: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%81VAG\\_H%C3%A9ja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%81VAG_H%C3%A9ja)



Messerschmitt Me-109 G2

## Messerschmitt Me 109<sup>117</sup>

### Specifications Me-109 G6

#### General characteristics

- **Crew:** One
- **Length:** 8.95 m (29 ft 7 in)
- **Wingspan:** 9.925 m (32 ft 6 in)
- **Power plant:** 1 × Daimler-Benz DB 605A-1 liquid-cooled inverted V12, 1,475 PS (1,455 hp, 1,085 kW)

#### Performance

- **Maximum speed:** 640 km/h (398 mph) at 6,300 m (20,669 ft)
- **Cruise speed:** 590 km/h (365 mph) at 6,000 m (19,680 ft)

- **Range:** 850 km (528 mi) 1,000 km (621 mi) with droptank
- **Service ceiling:** 12,000 m (39,370 ft)

#### Armament

- **Guns:**
  - 2 × 13 mm (.51 in) synchronized MG 131 machine guns with 300 rounds per gun
  - 1 × 20 mm (.78 in) MG 151/20 cannon as centerline *Motorkanone* with 200 rpg.
- or
  - 1 × 30 mm (1.18 in) MK 108 cannon as centerline *Motorkanone* with 65 rpg (G-6/U4 variant)
  - 2 × 20 mm MG 151/20 underwing cannon pods with 135 rpg (optional kit—*Rüstsatz VI*)
- **Rockets:** 2 × 21 cm (8 in) Wfr. Gr. 21 rockets (G-6 with BR21)
- **Bombs:** 1 × 250 kg (551 lb) bomb or 4 × 50 kg (110 lb) bombs or 1 × 300-liter (79 US gal) drop tank

#### Avionics

- FuG 16Z radio

The **Messerschmitt Me-109**, was a German World War II fighter aircraft that was the backbone of the Luftwaffe's fighter force. The Me-109 first saw operational service during the Spanish Civil War (1939) and was still in service at the dawn of the jet age at the end of World War II (1945). It was one of the most advanced fighters of the era, including such features as all-metal monocoque construction, a closed canopy, and retractable landing gear. It was powered by a liquid-



cooled, inverted-V12 aero engine. From the end of 1941, the Me-109 was steadily being supplemented by the superior Focke-Wulf Fw-190.

Royal Hungarian Air Force operated 3 D-1s, 50 E-3/-4s, 66 F-4s and 490 G-2/-4/-6/-8/-10/-14s. 390 of the 490 Me-109 G-2's were manufactured at the *Győri Vagon és Gépgyár* in Győr, Hungary.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>117</sup> The official German designation of this aircraft was Bf-109 after its manufacturer the Bayerische Flugzeugwerke, but was commonly known by Me-109.

<sup>118</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt\\_Bf\\_109](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt_Bf_109)





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**When** they first entered the Carpathian basin of Central Europe during the late 9th century, Hungarian horsemen distinguished themselves as skilled and courageous warriors, striking fear into the hearts of their enemies as they conquered the land, which still comprises the country of Hungary today.

This military prowess has remained a distinguishing characteristic of the Hungarian people throughout their history, from their valiant efforts to thwart the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan, to their stalwart resistance to subjugation by the Ottoman Empire. Although both invading empires ultimately succeeded in ruling over significant portions of the Hungarian homeland, their military victories and strategic successes were not due to the inability of the Hungarian defenders to stand their ground. Rather, it was the overwhelming size of the invading armies, which allowed them to eventually overpower the Hungarian forces they faced. Indeed, the noon bell, rung even today by churches worldwide, was ordered by the Pope as a commemoration of the successful Hungarian defense of Nándorfehérvár (today's Belgrade) against Ottoman forces, despite being outnumbered over 10 to 1. In a similar manner, although they enjoyed significant numerical superiority, the Austrian Hapsburgs were unable to decisively defeat the Hungarians in battle during the 18th century, leading to the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a political entity.

This long tradition of tenacious Hungarian fighting ability is also evident in more modern times. Caught between the geopolitical maneuverings of the great powers during World War II, Hungarian soldiers found themselves called upon yet again to fight outnumbered against better-equipped foes, first to maintain Hungarian sovereignty in the face of German encroachment, then to defend their homeland against a vindictive Soviet Russian onslaught.

Much of the military history written about WW II concerns itself with the campaigns and operations of the great powers. The military roles and contributions of the smaller nations, which were caught up in the maelstrom of events, go largely unnoted by historians. Viktor Falk's painstaking work describing the military campaigns and battles fought by the Hungarian Army during WW II is a notable step in remedying this documentary shortfall. He presents a detailed yet accessible chronicle of the military accomplishments of Hungarian forces, who often achieved tactical results, which greatly exceeded their capabilities, when thrust into battle under severe conditions and dire circumstances, against a better-equipped enemy far superior in numbers.

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Viktor Falk was an influential youth leader during my childhood in the Hungarian community of Cleveland. His guidance and mentorship played a significant role in who I am today: a successor to a long line of Hungarian warriors who served their nation, stood their ground, and requited themselves with honor, regardless of circumstances. It is therefore a great honor and privilege to offer to the reader his historical account of the Hungarian Army during WW II.

Zsolt Szentkiralyi  
Colonel, USA Retired