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## HUNGARIAN ROYAL GENDARMERIE

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February 14 of 1981 will mark the 100th anniversary of an organization of men little known outside the Hungarian sphere. I'm referring to the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, better known to all Hungarians as the Magyar Királyi Csendőrség. I feel it is fitting that we now take a few moments to become better acquainted with this small but decisive group of men.

Until the latter part of the 19th century, an effective police force outside the boundaries of the larger Hungarian cities was non-existent. Attempts were made at law enforcement by various groups such as the "betyárs," Robin Hood type rogues, or "pandurs," government armed local residents,



usually betyárs but, in general, the residents of the rural areas were left at the mercy of the lawbreakers. With the apparent need for a national police force, legislation was enacted which brought about the formation in 1881 of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie. It became their responsibility to maintain law and order in all areas outside the jurisdiction of the city police and enforcement of all federal laws. Since Hungary is predominantly agricultural, the vast majority of the territory fell under the responsibility of the newly formed force. This task required a breed of hardy, tenacious, independent men being able to work under harsh conditions, using their own good judgment to administer the law. Men were found equal to the challenge and thus began the proud service of the Hungarian Csendőrség.

The men picked to serve in the Csendőrség were initially all volunteers from the Hungarian army, better known as the Honvédség. This system permitted beforehand knowledge of the quality of each man; therefore, only those candidates meeting the highest standards were accepted. It also eliminated the need for additional training in military tactics, which was very important, since in time of war, as in World War I and World War II, the Csendőrs were called upon to deal with partisans and to supplement



units of the depleted Honvéd forces. Each man served a probationary period while undergoing didactic and field training. At the end of the training, final exams were given and on the basis of the results, plus competence and personal evaluation, a final decision was made as to his acceptance.

Initially, officers serving in the Csendőrség were recruited from the Honvédség much the same as the enlisted men. Eventually, a Csendőr training center for officers was established in Budapest. Acceptance into officer training was very

competitive, for being a Csendőr officer was a coveted title. Just to give an example of the competition, in 1936 1,500 applicants applied for 21 positions. As a means of simplifying the selection, qualification standards were upgraded which resulted in a relatively high proportion of candidates holding doctorate degrees. All candidates were required to first attend the Ludovika Military Academy in Budapest for one year of accelerated training and then to undergo an additional 11/2 years training at the Csendőr Officer Training Center. With the completion of the 2½ years, qualified cadets were commissioned as second lieutenants. The total officer corps in 1944 was approximately 650 men.

The Csendőr uniform varied from that of the Honvédség in a number of respects. The most prominent difference was their unique hat. The hat consisted of a black bowler hat on which left side was fixed a large bluish-green rooster feather plumage secured by a metallic emblem depicting the great seal of Hungary. As a result, the Caendórs were often referred to as the “kakastollasok” or rooster feathers. Enlisted men carried a well balanced short sword which served as an excellent deterrent when firearms were not deemed necessary. In those situations requiring firearms, the M35 Mannlicher rifle was available. Onto the rifle was fixed the Csendor bayonet which was considerably longer than the variety used by the honvédség. The long mounted bayonet, in addition to the tall rooster plumage, gave them an impressive presence.

Csendőrs are perhaps best remembered walking in pairs through a town, village, or in the countryside on their routine patrols. This was in the heat of the summer or the harshest of winters. In the wider expanses, mounted patrols were often used. Respected by all, feared by some, their mere presence was an excellent deterrent to crime. When all else failed, the Csendőrs were usually called to establish order. They were noted for their no nonsense attitude. Warning shots were never given. Seeing them in the area gave people the assurance of knowing they were safe. The Csendőrs were the guards of silence as their name implies.

The Csendőrség gave faithful duty in its 64 years of service. During the short lived post World War I communist regime, they were temporarily dissolved, but were reactivated upon Admiral Miklós Horthy von Nagybánya’s march into Budapest in 1919 and the subsequent overthrow of the Béla Kun government. Under Regent Horthy’s administration any form of communist activity was considered a crime. The burden of enforcing a halt to all communist activity and the surveillance of known communists fell to the Csendőrség. For this they were to pay a great price later. During the latter part of the 1930’s and early 40’s, Hungary was actively engaged in reoccupying territories lost by her after World

War I with the Treaty of Trianon. Controlling partisans in the newly liberated territories now became the responsibility of the Csendőrs. With the eventual outbreak of World War II, their workload was multiplied many times over. Now not only were they responsible for the additional territories, but more and more they found themselves engaged in direct conflict with enemy forces. In January of 1944 the Csendőrség numbered about 18,500 men. But with the continuation of the war, their numbers were drastically reduced. The crushing advance of the Russian forces necessitated sequestering them into Honvédség duties. Heavy losses were sustained as they sought hold the advancing Red Army.

On December 24 Russian forces completely encircled Budapest and started the 52 day siege of the capital. Five Csendőr flags, or 3,000 men and 160 officers along with Honvéd and German forces totaling approximately 70,000 fought to hold the city. A desperate defense ensued with diminished supplies against insurmountable odds. The defenders fought on well, aware of their final destiny. Budapest suffered terribly. Not only in innocent lives lost, but with the devastation inherent in desperate battles. Losses were numbered in many hundreds each day. Finally, on the morning of February 13, 1945, with complete depletion of defense capability, the siege ended. Many of the defenders who survived the battle were executed in the ensuing days; were sent to POW camps from which few returned; or were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured or treated in the most degrading and humiliating manner. Csendőrs, along with Honvéds and Germans numbering 40,000 in all, lay in the ruins of Buda Castle. On April 4th all of Hungary fell. It is difficult to say how many Csendőrs survived the war. The numbers and facts are few. Approximately 1,100 Csendőrs managed to escape to the west by leaving their beloved Hungary. They are now scattered throughout the world. Their numbers become fewer and fewer with each passing year. The great distances have prevented them from meeting often, but they maintain a unique bond with one another, in their hearts they retain a burning love for their homeland, for their comrades, and for the Csendőrség. They faithfully executed their orders, fought the good fight, and lived up to the standards epitomized by their motto: Híven, Becsülettel, Vitézül (Faithfully, With Honor, Valiantly).