

THE ROYAL HUNGARIAN GENDARMERIE AND POLICE

DURING WORLD WAR II

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The Hungarian Gendarmerie (Magyar Királyi Csendőrség) was created in 1881, while the Hungarian Police (Magyar Királyi Rendőrség) as a national force dates from 1919. Both of these organizations comprised the ministry of the Interior's Department VI - Police Forces (Karhatalmi osztály), the Police being subdepartment VI/a - (Rendőrségi alosztály) and the Gendarmerie subdepartment VI/b - Gendarmerie Service (Csendőrségi szolgálati alosztály).

The Gendarmerie, in addition to its operational subordination to the Ministry of the Interior, also had a close command and organizational relationship to the Ministry of Defense. An Inspector of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie in the rank of general headed a special Gendarmerie liaison staff within the Ministry of Defense. The Inspector was responsible for the military interests of the Gendarmerie, such as organizational and training matters. All Gendarmerie officers were trained at the Ludovika Military Academy, in Budapest. On 12 October, 1938 the relationship was formalized with the creation of Department 20, Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, within the Defense Ministry. Responsible for Gendarmerie planning, organization, training and personnel promotions and assignments, the Department was headed by Gend. Colonel Endre Temesvári, and then, from 1943-1945, by Gend. Colonel Ferenc Mátray.

The Police was initially a civilian organization, although during World War II it became increasingly paramilitary in character, and received its orders from the Budapest Chief of Police and a national Chief of Police, the latter exercising authority over all police forces outside of the capital. The Budapest Police was organized in 15 borough constabularies, each with a headquarters force and subordinate police stations, while the national or country Police manned the headquarters and police stations in the various cities and towns. Three branches of the Police - Administrative, Inspectors and Police Force were staffed with uniformed personnel, while detectives, technical personnel and clerical staff wore plain clothes.

The task of the Police was directed through the Ministry of the Interior's Department VII - Public Safety, with subdepartments VII/a - Public Safety, VII/b - Organizations, and VII/c - The National Central Alien Control Office, and Department VIII - Police Penal Department. An Auxiliary Police was formed in 1943 to support the regular Police during periods of crisis, and an appropriate subdepartment was created to administer this force.

The provisions of the Trianon Treaty of 4 June, 1920 greatly restricted the size of Hungary's armed forces. For this reason, military personnel were trained within the ranks of the Gendarmerie and Police, and then, as the restrictions on Hungary were gradually relaxed or disregarded in the late twenties and early thirties, transferred to the Honvédség. Between 1 July, 1928 and 1 July, 1930, for example, the Gendarmerie provided 3,964 fully trained men to the Honvédség (Hungarian Army) and the Police 2,036.

By 1944 the Budapest Chief of Police, Sándor Eliássy, had almost total control over the Hungarian Police, including the recently formed Political Police Department (Politikai rendészeti osztály). This department operated under relatively mild policies until the German takeover in Hungary on 19 March, 1944, at which time the Germans dictated major organizational changes, which brought about its removal from the Ministry of the Interior, and subordination directly under the Secretary of State. The department's name was changed to the State Security Police (Állambiztonsági Rendészet) and Detective Inspector General Péter Hain became its director, except during the period July-October 1944, when it was under Valér Nagy. After 15 October, 1944, a second political police department was created for the primary purpose of breaking the weak Hungarian resistance, and it was called the National Unit for Accountability (Nemzeti Számonkérő Különítmény) with Gend. Lt. Colonel Norbert Orendy as director.

In 1937, the strength of the Hungarian Police was 13,600, and 12,728 on 1 August, 1940, but after June 1941, it began to increase to allow for a number of newly formed paramilitary units, which included a cavalry detachment, infantry regiment, training battalion, armored car detachment, bicycle detachment, civil defense technical engineer battalion, flak detachment, civil defense company, etc. When the war came to Hungary proper in the summer of 1944, the Police became increasingly combat oriented, and a number of new units were formed, many of which were ad hoc in nature and included Gendarmerie, Auxiliary Police and other personnel withdrawn from the eastern part of the country. The final months of the Police will be discussed later.

Besides the ministry of the Interior, two other ministries operated police-type forces: Finance and Agriculture. The ministry of Finance controlled the 3,415-man Excise or Finance Guard, which enforced the excise laws, and the 4,741-man Customs Guard, which operated the frontier customs stations. The Ministry of Agriculture controlled a 312-man force of gamekeepers and forest rangers, called Agricultural Police (Mezőrendőrség).

While the Police was responsible for maintaining law and order in Budapest and the larger cities and towns, the Gendarmerie had the same responsibility for the rest of the country. Operational control was through the Superintendent of the Royal Hungarian Gend. Lt. General Márton Nemerey, followed in 1944 by Lt. General Gábor Faraghó, a Gendarmerie Central Command in Budapest, and 10 Gendarmerie district commands, while administrative matters were under Colonel Istvan Vadászy, head of the Ministry of the Interior's Department VI/b. The Hungarian ministry of Defense supervised the Gendarmerie for purposes of training and discipline, as already stated.

The Gendarmerie was a highly trained, elite, paramilitary force that employed military ranks and was under military discipline. Regular Gendarmes were hand-picked volunteers, who underwent a full year of college-level training in law and administrative procedures. They wore a distinctive uniform, and a special hat with a chin strap and a large plume of feathers that cascaded off to the left side. Armament consisted of a Mannlicher rifle mounting an unusually long bayonet. The 10 Gendarmerie district commands and their commanders in early 1944 were as follows:

I	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Budapest	Cal. Lénárd Torzsay
II	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Székesfehérvár	Col. József Zirczy
III	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Szombathely	Col. Vilmos Poltáry
IV	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Pécs	Col. László Perey
V	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Szeged	Col. Vilmos Sellyey
VI	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Debrecen	Col. Artúr Sasady
VII	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Miskolc	Col. József Bátky
VIII	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Kassa	Cal. Győző Tölgyesy
IX	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Kolozsvár	Col. Ferenc Vattay
X	Gend. Dist. Cmd. — Marosvásárhely	Cal. Aladár Pintér

Each of the district commands, which had the status of a regiment, subordinated 3 to 4 county commands with the status of a battalion, which in turn controlled 3 to 5 wing commands with the status of a company. The county commands were generally under a Lt. Colonel or major, and the wing commands under a Captain or 1st Lieutenant. Training for the Gendarmerie was carried out by the Gendarmerie School Command at Nagyvárad under Colonel Tibor Paksy-Kiss, later Colonel Jenő Péterffy.

The total strength of the Gendarmerie in 1937 was 12,700, and 11,450 on 1 August, 1940. During the war, the size of the Gendarmerie was gradually increased to meet the expanded role asked of it. Partisan infiltration and the parachuting of Soviet agents into the area along Hungary's eastern borders brought the need for strengthened and increased patrol activity. Frequent attacks by Tito's Partisans in the areas of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia reclaimed by Hungary in April, 1941 placed a heavy burden on Gendarmerie resources. By 1 July, 1944 the strength of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie had risen to 22,000.

Before discussing the final months of the Royal Hungarian Police and Gendarmerie, a brief mention should be made of the Honvédség's field gendarmerie forces. These forces were staffed with personnel from the Gendarmerie, who were sequestered to the Army. In August 1944, field gendarmerie combat groups (harcfegyelembiztosító csapat)

were created from the former field gendarmerie units of the Honvédség, and assigned at the rate of one company each to all armies, corps, and divisions. Many Gendarmerie personnel withdrawn from eastern and central Hungary during the fall of 1944 were taken into these combat groups as reinforcements.

The valiant defensive battles fought by the Hungarian 1st Army in the summer of 1944 along the Carpathian front in eastern Hungary took a heavy toll in casualties and forced the Honvédség to mobilize its remaining corps and divisions. The mobilization of the 13th Infantry Division on 22 July, 1944 necessitated the assumption of security responsibilities in the Ujvidék area by local Gendarmerie units and several brought in from elsewhere. Concentrated in the area were the “Ujvidék”, “Galánta” and “Kiskunhalas” Gendarmerie Battalions, and the “Makó” and “Zombor” Gendarmerie Companies.

A few days later the Hungarian III Corps was mobilized, and Gendarmerie companies were moved to Csömödér, Berzence, Barcs and Dárda to reinforce the frontier services along the Drava (Drau) River. During late August, in conjunction with the mobilization of IV Corps, Gendarmerie Battalion “Szombathy” assumed field security responsibilities in the Mur region and the oilfields at Zala, with headquarters in Csáktornya after 22 October.

The full weight of the Russian attack on Hungary began in late August/early September 1944. Gendarmerie units in the eastern part of the country participated in the defense of the Transylvanian valleys, but the overwhelming number of the Red Army was too much for the combined Hungarian and German forces and a gradual withdrawal to the west was inevitable. The IV Gendarmerie District Headquarters withdrew to Marcali, V to Kaposvár, VI and VII to Balassagyarmat, VIII to Zalaegerszeg, and IX and X to Szombathely. Gendarmerie Instructional-Demonstration Battalions “Nagyvárad” and “Munkács” also relocated in the western part of the country, while the Instructional-Demonstration Battalion “Ungvár” was assigned to duty with the Hungarian 1st Army. On 16 November the Gendarmerie Central Reception Center was established at Répcelak to assemble and regroup withdrawing units and personnel.

Important organizational changes also took place during the fall of 1944. Shortly after the Szálasi Government came to power on 15 October, 1944, all Gendarmerie and Police forces were consolidated for combat purposes under a newly appointed Inspector General of the Gendarmerie and Police. At approximately the same time, Gendarmerie Major General Endre Temesvári was appointed head of the Gendarmerie, and Police Major General Pál Hódosy head of the Police.

As the Red Army continued its advance into Hungary, a number of Gendarmerie and Police units were used to fill out defensive positions in the hastily erected Margareten Line south of Lake Balaton. Many of these formations were called “karhatalmi” (security) units and were improvised from whatever manpower was available, including regular army and frontier units, as well as Gendarmerie and Police. Tactically subordinated to the German 118th Jager Division was the Hungarian Combat Group “Lt. Colonel Antal Zirczy” which, along with other units, included the “Muraszombat” Security Company at Égenföld and the “Zalaegerszeg” Security Company at Balatonmagyaród. In addition, the “Spány” Gendarmerie Company with two platoons of mounted Gendarmerie and 60 Gendarmerie infantry were also tactically under the 118th Jager Division. The “Kaposvár” Gendarmerie Battalion (Gend. Lt. Colonel Reviczky), tactically under the German 1st Mountain Division, was located in Marcali, while the “Szombathely” Security Battalion was at Inke, under the German 71st Infantry Division. Another unit, the “Mecsek” Security Battalion, was also in this area.

Located in the same general vicinity and at various times under the German 44th HuD Grenadier Division, 71st Infantry Division and the 13th SS-“Handschar” Division were improvised units formed on 21 December, 1944, called the “Bakony” Security and Alarm Regiment (Colonel Sándor Martsa). The Regiment had some Police personnel in its four-battalion composition, which included the “Szombathely” Security Battalion noted above, but how many, is not known. The total strength of the Regiment was around 2,800 men, then 2,200 on 31 March, 1945. Colonel Martsa later became commander of the 8th Field Replacement Division, with the “Bakony” Regiment being part of the Division.

Three other regimental-size units were formed in the Nagykanizsa-Lenti area southwest of Lake Balaton in the fall of 1944. These also had Police personnel assigned to them, as well as several Gendarmerie battalions. The “Mura”

Security Regiment (Colonel Hán) and the “Dráva” Security Regiment (Colonel Szász) each had three battalions, while the improvised “Muravidék” Security Formation, which had been put together primarily from Honvéd replacement troops, had four battalions equipped with old French rifles. The III Battalion of the “Dráva” Regiment was in fact the former “Szombathely” Gendarmerie Instructional-Demonstration Battalion, and was commanded by Captain Dr. József Csáki. Initially, these three units were under the 4th Honvéd District Command (Pécs) and assigned to guard the railway tracks in southwest Hungary, and maintain law and order throughout the area. They were later assigned to the 8th Field Replacement Division. The “Muravidék” Security Formation eventually came under the 7th Field Replacement Division.

Meanwhile, during November and early December 1944, the Gendarmerie and Police forces in Budapest were reinforced by the various companies and battalions withdrawing from eastern and central Hungary. By 25 December, this force, under the overall command of General Kalandy, consisted of the Budapest Gendarmerie Regiment (Colonel Gyula Szilady) with the “Galánta”, “Zilah”, “Beszterce”, “Székelyudvarhely” and “Péc” Gendarmerie Battalions in a strength of 3,160 officers and men, the Budapest Police Regiment (Police Colonel József Balogh) and two Police civil defense companies. The strength of the Police force is not known, but probably numbered around 3,000. These forces were encircled in the city, fought in its defense, and were lost when Budapest fell on 13 February, 1945.

An unidentified Gendarmerie battalion, under Captain Miklós Békássy, was incorporated into the newly formed Szent László Division during late October, becoming the II Battalion of the Division’s Grenadier Regiment. This Battalion later went over to the Russians on 26 December, at Helemba, during heavy fighting along the Ipoly River.

To the south of Budapest, around the city of Paks on the Danube, the “Újvidék” and “Debrecen” Gendarmerie Battalions, and the “Újvidék” Gendarmerie Instructional-Demonstration Battalion were attached to the Hungarian 1st River Brigade during late October as reinforcements, and assigned to defensive positions along a 23 km stretch on the west side of the river. Russian forces attacked, and took this area in November, and these three battalions were subsequently lost.

In northwest Hungary, the 2nd Honvéd District (Lt. General István Kiss) located in Székesfehérvár, then in Győr, formed an improvised combat group in mid-December that included the “Komárom” Security Battalion (Captain Bartha), a Gendarmerie platoon from the II Gendarmerie District, a “Levente” (Youth) volunteer assault company and Air Force and Flak personnel.

The Russian offensive in March 1945 quickly drove the greatly weakened Hungarian and German forces across the border into Austria. On 15 March, at about the time the Russian offensive began, the total strength of the Hungarian Gendarmerie was given as 11,000. At the end of March/beginning of April, the “Kaposvár” Gendarmerie Battalion (Major Károly Bessenyi) was fighting within the ranks of the Szent László Division, the “Muraköz” Gendarmerie Battalion under the 7th Field Replacement Division, the “Koppány” Gendarmerie Battalion (Lt. Colonel Németh) under the 2nd Armored Division, and a field gendarmerie battalion (Gend. Captain Károly Kövendy) under the 1st Cavalry Division. The “Dráva” Regiment, with the Dráva I, II, and III Battalions in a strength of 2,000 men, was under control of the German Army Rear Area Command (Korück) 582. The “Dráva” III Battalion, as will be recalled, was the former “Szombathely” Gendarme Instructional-Demonstration Battalion. Other Gendarmerie forces under command of Gend. Colonel István Láday were guarding railway lines around Körmend, while a Gendarmerie company under Gend. Captain Laszló Malonyi and a Police battalion under Police Major Béla Gántay were participating in the defense of Kőszeg, near the Austrian border in northwest Hungary. Another unit, the “Hajdú” Police Rifle battalion, which had previously been in the village of Oszkó (20 km. east of Körmend), was under the direct control of the 4th Honvéd District. Finally, a contemporary document dated mid-April 1945 mentions the Hungarian 2nd Gendarmerie Regiment in a strength of 23 officers and 1,254 men as being assigned to the German Fortress Area Southeast (Festungsbereich Südost), although in reality this may have been the “Dráva” Regiment, and a separate Hungarian Gendarmerie company as being assigned to German Staff “Lindner”.

Except for the “Kaposvár” Battalion, the final fate of the Hungarian Gendarmerie and Police units is not known. They undoubtedly were caught up in the general withdrawal into central Austria, fighting a desperate

rearguard action all the way, some maintaining their organizational integrity, while others disintegrating from the loss of men and the lack of replacements, finally surrendering to American and British forces on 8 May. The “Kaposvár” Gendarmerie Battalion, as a component of the Szent László Division, was forced back into south-central Austria and, along with the rest of the Division, surrendered to the British at Deutschlandsberg on 8 May, 1945.

The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie lost approximately 11,000 men during World War II, almost all of whom were killed or missing in the final 7 months. Hungarian Police losses are not known with certainty, but probably number 8,000-9,000. Today, an active association for veterans of the Hungarian Gendarmerie and Police has its headquarters in Canada.

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