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The Hungarian Honvéd Army

(1868–1918)

Institute and Museum of Military History
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The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie

After the defeat of the 1848/49 War of Independence, and until the Settlement of 1867, law and order in Hungary was secured by gendarme regiments acting under the auspices of the common army. This policing role was also a means of political leverage: in 1866, as a gesture towards the future Settlement, the gendarme regiments were disbanded and – in an effort to put law and order into ‘civilian’ hands, and put a greater emphasis on public safety – the ‘Gendarme Command Headquarters’ were created. After the Settlement, these were closed down and their responsibilities were taken over by the county courts; ‘law and order’ itself was ensured by the old Pandours, as well as the county law and order commissioner. In Transylvania and Croatia-Slavonia, however, the Gendarme Command Headquarters survived and continued to exist under imperial and royal rule, with German as the ‘working’ language. The Hungarian element of their operations was loosely tied to the Hungarian Ministry of Home Affairs.

In 1876, after negotiations that stretched over five years, the Gendarme Headquarters of Transylvania and Croatia-Slavonia also came under the control of the Hungarian government, which actually resulted in ‘double’ supervision by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs.¹ The Transylvanian Gendarme Command Headquarters became the ‘Hungarian Royal Transylvanian Gendarmerie’, and Hungarian, the language of command; and the Croatian variant became the ‘Hungarian Royal Croatian-Slavonian Gendarmerie’, with its headquarters in Zagreb and Croatian as the language of command.

The Hungarian police system was regularised in 1881, when a unified ‘Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie’ was established. In accordance with the Honvéd district system, six Gendarme Command Headquarters were set up. (Although these unified rules were extended to the Croatian-Slavonian Gendarmerie, it enjoyed a certain

degree of independence that survived right until the end of the period in question.) The new organisational structure was completed by 1887: in six districts (eight after 1914), there were 25 Gendarme Branch Headquarters, 63 Gendarme Sections and 926 Gendarme Stations. The regular personnel comprised 117 officers and 5385 gendarmes.²

The staff of the Gendarmerie (NCOs and other ranks) was initially made up of members of its earlier incarnation’s disbanded regiments, one-time county Pandours and voluntary new members. New gendarmes had to serve a six-month probation period; after this – if confirmed in their post – they received a gendarme rank. Eventually, the common army



Gendarme (military rank equivalent: corporal) in service dress, 1881.



Gendarme officer (captain) in parade dress, 1881.



M 1881 plate from a gendarme's shako – In terms of shape the plate is a copy of the 1869 model shako plate of the Honvéd Army but the elements it contains are those of the 'small' instead of the 'medium' coat of arms.



A variant of the coat of arms worn on hats, with elements of the 1892 medium coat of arms – The wedge at the bottom is the coat of arms of Fiume. This insignia was eventually not introduced. Instead, the coat of arms used on the Honvéd hussar shako was chosen.



Honvéd gendarme patrol in the 1880s.

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and the two territorial armies (the Honvéd Army and the *Landwehr*) became the chief source of replacements. Those who transferred from these organisations (particularly NCOs) were classified as performing 'continued service' and were granted a position that was more or less in line with their rank. Regular gendarme NCOs were professionally trained from 1909 onwards, when the Gendarmerie opened its own training institute in Nagyvárad. This was officially known as the 'Hungarian Royal Gendarme Further Training and NCO Training School' (this name was changed in 1913 to 'National Hungarian Royal Gendarme School'). The officer corps was organised in a similar fashion: in the first few years after its establishment, a great number of county law-and-order commissioners became gendarme officers. Others came from the officer corps of the Honvéd Army (officers, NCOs) and from the reserves. By transferring, they gave up their officer ranking – they joined a six-month training course at the Gendarme School as 'gendarme corporals on probation'. After graduation, they were promoted to 'gendarme sergeant' and then 'gendarme cadet', and finally 'gendarme second lieutenant'. From the 1890s onwards, gendarme training was also taught at Ludovika Academy.³

As the institutional framework of the Gendarmerie grew increasingly complex, several special posts were established. In 1895, an accountancy officer's post was created to handle the Gendarmerie's financial and management issues; in 1899, a staff sergeant's post was set up to oversee the accountancy and record-keeping.

Mounted gendarme assigned to ensure law and order during a military exercise. The photograph was probably taken between 1898 and 1903. The yellow-black-and-yellow armband on the left arm indicates the service post.



The Gendarmerie's ranks corresponded to the system used in the Honvéd Army:

Gendarmerie rank	Military rank	Distinction
gendarme on probation	–	–
gendarme	corporal (after 1912, sergeant 2 nd class)	2 bone stars or 3 celluloid ⁵ stars
gendarme head of station / brevet head of station	sergeant second class	3 bone stars (celluloid)
gendarme head of station / brevet sergeant (chief and under sergeant after 1916)	sergeant	3 bone (celluloid) stars on yellow silk braid
gendarme sergeant	sergeant	20mm yellow braid with cherry-red dividing line, 3 celluloid stars ⁶
sergeant 1 st and 2 nd class, district sergeant, staff sergeant	staff NCO	13mm yellow silk and 6mm gold braid, 3 celluloid stars
gendarme warrant officer (after 1915)	warrant officer	13mm yellow silk and 6mm gold braid, silver (metal) star
gendarme cadet	cadet	13mm golden braid, 3 white (silk) stars
gendarme ensign	ensign	13mm gold braid, silver (metal) star
gendarme second lieutenant	second lieutenant	1 gold star
gendarme first lieutenant	first lieutenant	2 gold stars
gendarme captain	captain	3 gold stars
gendarme major	major	1 silver star on gold braid
gendarme lieut. colonel	lieutenant colonel	2 silver stars on gold braid
gendarme colonel	colonel	3 silver stars on gold braid

From 1903, the district sergeant's post fulfilled the administrative tasks of the gendarme districts; from 1904, an accountant counsellor was assigned to the equipment depots; and in 1913, a veterinarian was assigned to the horse replacement department, and a chief master blacksmith, to the department in charge of training the replacement horses. The total personnel of the Hungarian and Croatian-Slavonian gendarmerie numbered around 9000 on the eve of World War I; there were 250 officers, including 28 accountant officers, two second-class accountancy counsellors and two veterinarians. A particular group of the personnel – around 700 men – served on horseback (they were the 'Mounted Gendarmerie').⁴ Although its hierarchy and organisational system underwent a number of changes, the Gendarmerie retained many of its pre-

1897 clothing and symbols. The spiked helmet – a hated reminder of the darkest days of absolutism – was replaced in 1860 by a style of hat with rooster feathers that was commonly worn in *Jäger* units. After 1868, gendarmes wore the universal gendarmerie badge with the flaming grenade; on their ammunition pouches, the two-headed eagle was replaced by the same badge. Otherwise, the characteristic elements of their uniform (items like the green *Waffenrock* with madder-red facings and the grey trousers) remained the same.⁷ This attire was also worn by the Transylvanian and Croatian-Slavonic gendarmes from after the Settlement until 1876, and with *k. u. k.* insignia from 1876 to 1881. Later on, under Hungarian authority, it was used with Hungarian insignia (the national coat of arms surrounded by a wreath) on the gendarmes'

hat and on the lid of their ammunition pouch.⁸

The Hungarian gendarmerie uniform was created in 1881 from the original gendarmerie and contemporary Honvéd Army uniforms. The rooster-feathered hat, the grey trousers with piping, the overcoat and part of the blouse were all made in the dark-green colour reserved for the Gendarmerie (with madder-red facings). But they followed the design favoured by the Honvéd Army – something of a mix of an infantry and a hussar blouse, with fancy cording on the chest area, padded cloth crescents around the shoulder seam, and shoulder cords. The summer blouse did not have chest cords; because of this, it looked more like an ordinary infantry-style blouse. The Gendarmerie officers wore special a dark-green attila with black lining, and a madder-red collar and cuffs. The insignia were borrowed from the Honvéd Army: on their hats, the gendarmes wore the 1876-style plate with the Hungarian coat of arms in the centre; and on their field caps, a cockade with the monogram 'IFJ'. They also wore the 'service emblem' of officers: a Honvéd infantry officer's sash.⁹

In 1885, a few new items of clothing were introduced to the Gendarmerie: this was when the dark-green Hungarian tunic with scale buttons first came into use.¹⁰ In 1895, further modifications followed. The plate on the hat was replaced by the 1891-style shako plate, the tunic's arm cording was removed, and the black sheepskin collar on the overcoat was officially accepted. At the same time, commanders of sections, station commanders and district commanders were ordered to indicate their status with a small flat metal button on the collar of their overcoat.¹¹ These were not the last modifications made to the uniform, but its overall character stayed the same from then on: indeed, certain elements – like the hat and the officers' parade tunic – survived well into the post-World War I years.

In the first part of the 20th century, some

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of the above-mentioned modifications were simply adaptations of those affecting the Honvéd uniform, while others were practical alterations that were specially devised for Gendarmerie attire. In 1907, a cape was introduced.¹² In 1910, the salaried staff's brown leather gloves were changed to grey, the officers were prescribed gaiters, and all gendarmes were made to wear a grey neck cloth.¹³ In 1912, the headgear was finally regularised: other ranks were given the black cap (with braiding made of yellow-black silk cord and madder red trimming along the top edge) that had hitherto officially been the privilege of officers. The cord-decorated blouses were withdrawn and – for other ranks and officers alike – replaced

by the blouse with concealed buttons introduced in the Honvéd Army in 1906. Gendarmes had two years' 'wear-out' time, and officers, four years in which to replace the old blouses with the new ones. This meant that the old ones were still in use during the War.¹⁴

World War I forced a number of changes to the Gendarmerie uniform. In 1916, field-grey uniforms and fur coats were introduced on a temporary basis. The madder-red felt collar tab on a green base was also added to the blouse and the overcoat.¹⁵ In the same year, it was decided that in combat, gendarmes would be allowed to wear (extra) clothes that they had had made themselves.¹⁶ Near the end of the War, the shortage of raw materials

reached the Gendarmerie: production of green cloth was stopped, so no more Hungarian tunics could be made.¹⁷ In the last months of the War, the use of silk rank stars was also suspended – that is, if any of these type of regulations were put into practice at all – and celluloid stars were reintroduced instead. The acquisition of arm-braids for soldiers in continued service was also stopped, and the same went for leather gloves.¹⁸ The Gendarmerie was no longer issued its summer trousers; instead, it was recommended that they dye the white pantaloons black, as they would do perfectly well for front service.¹⁹ Indeed, after a while, the issuing of regular, ready-made uniforms stopped altogether and the Honvéd Army depots



A gendarme handcuffing a suspect. This arranged photograph was probably taken in the early 1910s.