

1456. 1956
555 YEARS. 55 YEARS



From the Noon Bell
to the Lads of Pest

1456, 1956
555 YEARS, 55 YEARS



FROM THE NOON BELL
TO THE LADS OF PEST

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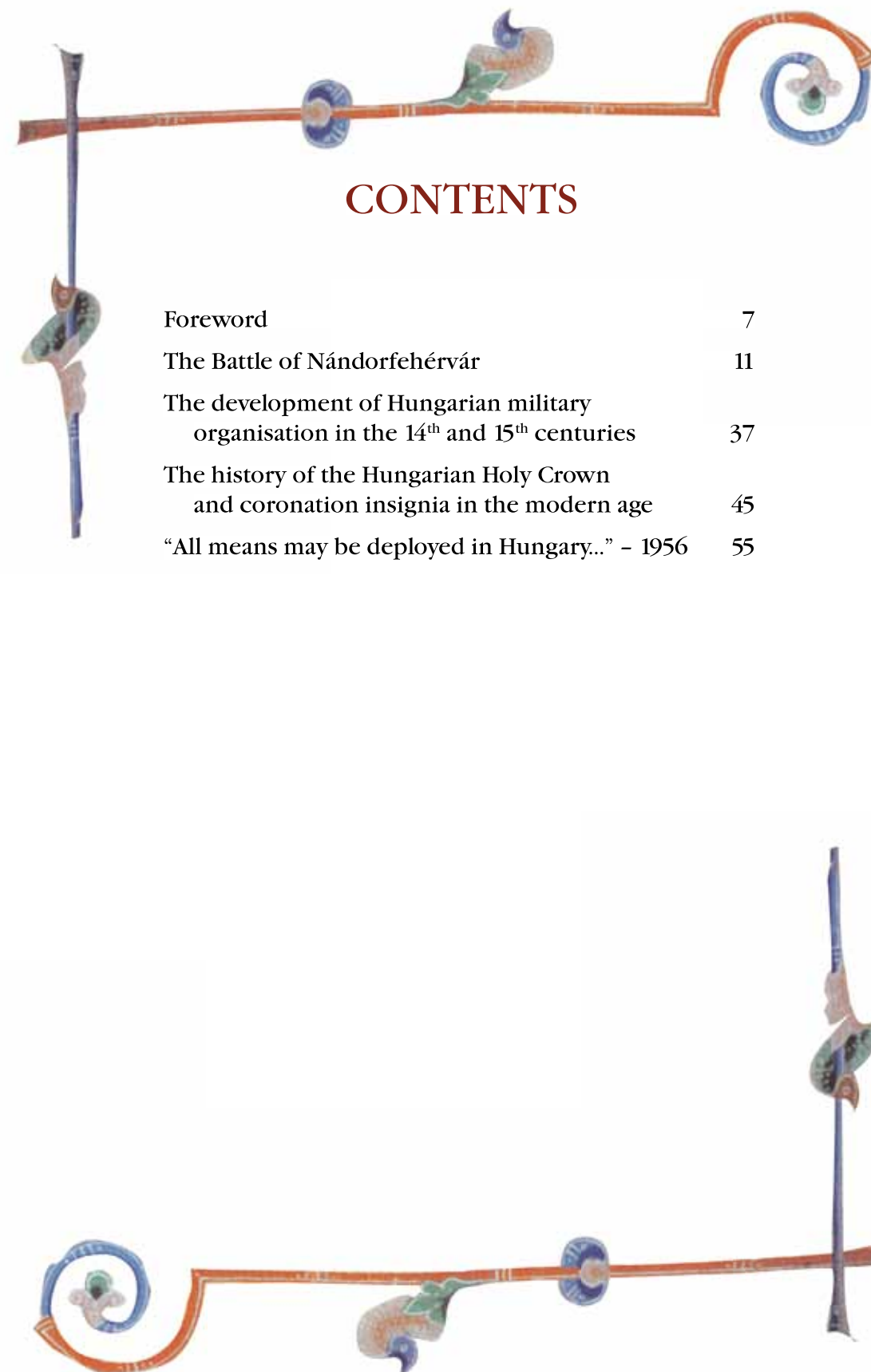
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The front cover shows “The Death of Titusz Dugovics”, a painting
by Sándor Wagner. Back cover: In 1956, Time Magazine chose the Hungarian
freedom fighter as the Man of the Year. The picture
on page 3 shows “Time Ship”, an artwork by Anna Mária Jakobi.



CONTENTS

Foreword	7
The Battle of Nándorfehérvár	11
The development of Hungarian military organisation in the 14 th and 15 th centuries	37
The history of the Hungarian Holy Crown and coronation insignia in the modern age	45
“All means may be deployed in Hungary...” – 1956	55



PORTRAIT OF JOHN HUNYADI IN JÁNOS THURÓCZY'S BOOK
"CHRONICLE OF THE HUNGARIANS"

FOREWORD

"For Whom the Bell Tolls" is the title of Hemingway's famous novel. It quotes John Donne's Meditation, a well-known line of which goes "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main".

We might try to rephrase Donne's sentence to characterize a whole nation like Hungary, the "shield of Christianity" in the Middle Ages. Already an integral "piece of the continent" for several centuries, in 1456 our country heroically defended Europe against the sultan's huge army at the castle of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade), against improbable odds. Since that victory, throughout the Christian world the bells toll for Hungary at noon every day, commemorating the heroes of our nation.

500 years after the siege of Nándorfehérvár, in the autumn of 1956, Hungarians rose up to overthrow an oppressive and brutal communist regime. This time fighting against insurmountable odds on the streets of the capital, Budapest, Hungarian insurgents engaged the invading Soviet troops sent to crush the revolution.



MIKLÓS MELOCCO: 1956 MEMORIAL (SZEGED)



FOREWORD



Without our mysterious faith in Hungarian history, we could not appreciate that Hungary, in defending the whole of Europe, could hold up its blood-spattered body first at Nándorfehérvár along the Danube in 1456, and then at another city by the same river, Budapest, in 1956, exactly 500 years later, the first time victorious, the second time left hopelessly to itself, and thereby ultimately once again victorious. Without this mystery, we could not appreciate that, as these lines are written, we are celebrating the 555th anniversary of Nándorfehérvár and the bells at noon, and the 55th anniversary of Budapest and the brutal silencing of the unsilenceable words of freedom.

Were all of the “lads of Pest” of 1956 buried somehow, at least hurriedly, at least in the mud? Was everyone accounted for? Is there an unknown voice enclosed in concrete under the asphalt which, when it lived, shouted at the expense of its owner’s life, screaming *Long live Hungary, long live Hungarian freedom!* at the last bullet? And if we know where they died, do we always know why? The 20th century symbol of freedom, 16 year-old student Kata Magyar – a young girl who volunteered to help as a nurse – as she rushed along the streets to tend the wounded, why was she shot dead?

Her grave, under the undyingly beautiful arch of the rainbow, how near is it to Árpád’s, who has been the father of us all since the Hungarian Conquest in 895–896?



STATUE TO JOHN HUNYADI WEARING MEDIEVAL ARMOUR IN BUDA CASTLE,
SCULPTED BY ISTVÁN TÓTH
(PHOTO: VERONIKA DÉVÉNYI)

THE BATTLE OF NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR*

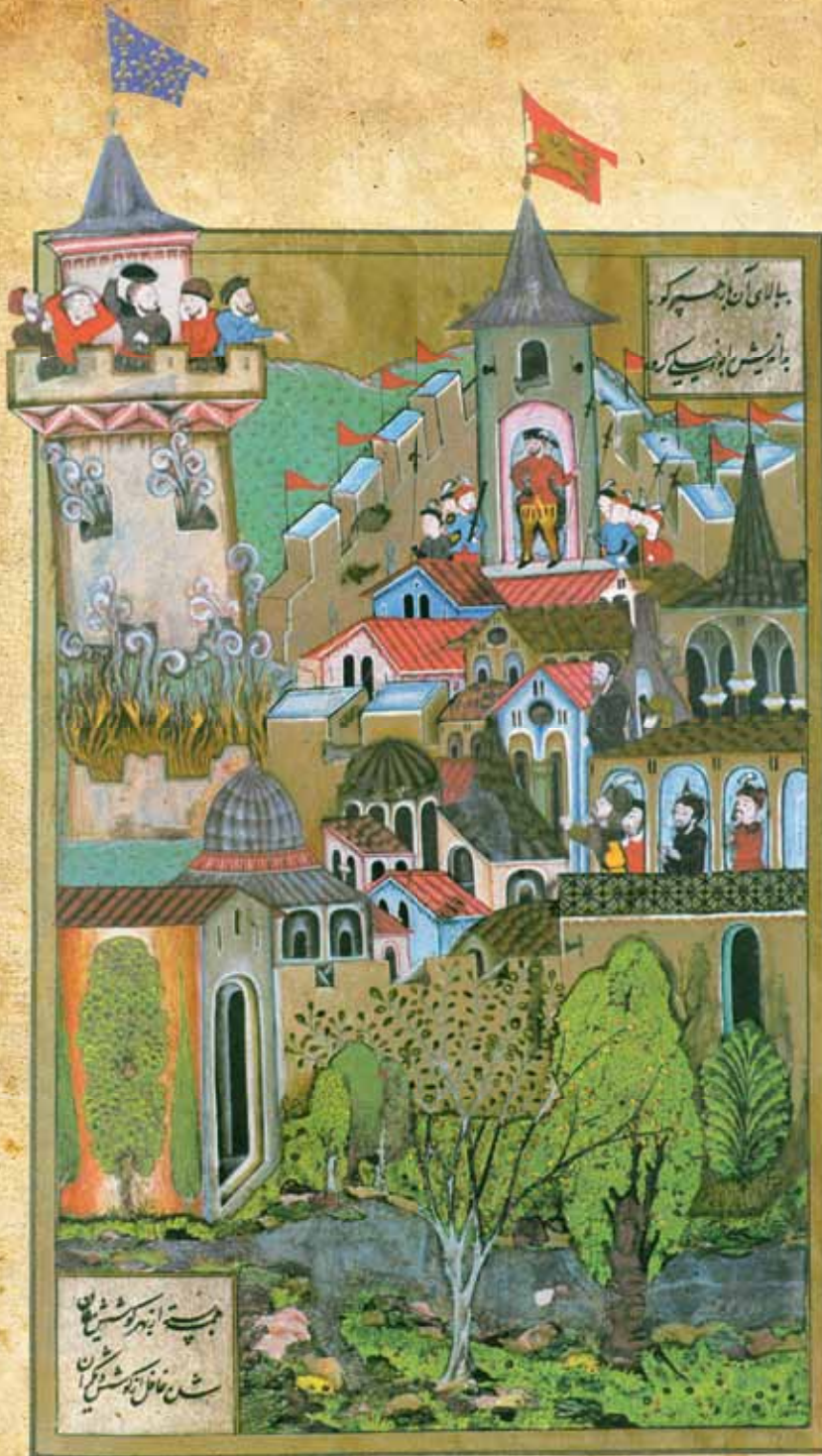


THE HUNYADI COAT OF ARMS

After the defeat of Kosovo (1448), John Hunyadi was on the political defensive, making it impossible for him to organise another large-scale campaign against the Ottomans. Although he wanted to take revenge against his humiliation by Branković, he was forced by the Hungarian barons to make a settlement with him, and even signed a truce with the Ottomans in 1451. At the end of 1452, Hungarian King Ladislas V was freed from captivity by his uncle, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III, and next year started his actual reign in the country. Hunyadi stepped down as Regent, but retained his unlimited power: Ladislas V appointed him Governor and Keeper of the Crown Revenues, so that he still controlled Hungary's financial resources.

The situation changed in 1453, when Murad II and his successor Mehmed II, after a nearly two-month siege, captured Constantinople.

This earned Mehmed the title of Conqueror. Although it was not an unexpected event, it aroused astonishment and horror in the Christian world. The Pope proclaimed a crusade in September 1453, and Hunyadi worked out a plan for an anti-Ottoman campaign bigger than anything that had gone before. In 1454 and 1455, Mehmed turned against Serbia, to which Hunyadi replied with a lightning campaign ending in the burning of Kruševac. Nothing came of the grand campaign, indeed Hunyadi wanted to send one of his confidantes, Miklós Vízaknai, to the Sultan in June 1455 to request another truce, so as to secure Hungary's position. All in vain. His confidence boosted, Mehmed II decided in early 1456 that he would attempt to take Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade), which had been besieged unsuccessfully sixteen years earlier.



NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR WAS THE KEY TO THE HUNGARIAN SOUTHERN LINE OF DEFENCE, AND ITS LOSS IN 1521 QUICKLY LED TO THE CATASTROPHE OF MOHÁCS

Now the feared occupier of Constantinople, Sultan Mehmed set off with his forces against the strongest link in the chain of defensive castles around Hungary, Nándorfehérvár, in May 1456. The campaign did not take the Hungarian government by surprise, because as usual, news of the impending Turkish attack arrived from Ragusa at the end of the year before. Nonetheless, the Buda Diet at the end of February, with the participation of the King, first ordered the troops to gather on the first day of August, and only the ominous news caused them to speed up the mobilisation. It is of course true that there had been news of a general Turkish attack nearly every year since 1440, but the information had hitherto turned out to be unfounded. Additionally, a general mobilisation in summer effectively paralysed the country's economic life and caused serious losses to all those required to be absent from their lands for prolonged periods.

Actual preparations were for the moment only made by the Governor, Hunyadi, who had been in office since 1453. He reinforced the Nándorfehérvár garrison with Hungarian, Bohemian and Polish mercenaries, a total of some five thousand, and obtained from the towns, according to the custom of the time, firearms (and gunners), military material and transport equipment (wagons and ships). The castle preparing for the siege was in the charge of Mihály Szilágyi, Hunyadi's brother-in-law. The Governor, having control of the royal revenues, equipped an army of about 10,000 cavalry, primarily from the nobles in the part of the country under his rule, although he also hired mercenaries. King Ladislas, however, who came into conflict with his relative in Austria, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III, left the country as preparations were reaching their peak in early July. That the other barons did not rush to fulfil their duties of raising militias was due to jealousy of Hunyadi and apprehensiveness of the grim sacrifice of blood in previous campaigns against the Ottomans. The only baron who came in person was János Kőrögyi, Ban of Macsó, but Hunyadi's former loyal ally Miklós Újlaki also sent his forces.



Standing in marked contrast to the hesitating dignitaries was the vigorous Franciscan preacher John Capistrano, who was later canonised. After recruiting in Germany and the Bohemian lands, he attempted to rouse the people of Hungary's most threatened southern lands to take up the fight. At his call, and the promise of pardon for their sins, thousands of peasants, tradesmen and market town burghers from the southern counties joined his movement. Crusaders also arrived from other countries in Europe, especially Germany. To raise the fervour of the crusaders and recruit more fighters, the Pope ordered the bells to be rung every day at noon. This Papal bull may be regarded as the origin of the noon bell-ringing which became customary throughout Europe. The military value of these troops did not of course approach that of regular units, because they arrived on foot with equipment that consisted largely of peasant weapons, and had no military experience. Nonetheless, their bitterness at the Turkish raids which had become an everyday occurrence in recent years and their religious fervour made them a determined force.

The 60-70,000 strong Turkish army arrived under Nándorfehérvár on 3 July. The castle itself was built at the confluence of the Danube and the Sava, on the tongue of land formed by the two rivers. The actual fortress stood at the tip of the land, and was divided into two parts, the lower and upper fortresses. This was separated by a wall from the town, also fortified by a wall, which spread to the south, and entrance from there to the castle was by a single gate. The position of the castle was such that it could only be besieged from the south, but a strong fleet on the two great rivers could easily prevent reinforcements coming from Hungary to reach the besieged fort. In any case, this was only possible from the river castle at the confluence of the two rivers, where the military port of the *naszád* gunboats lay. Accordingly, the Ottomans completely sealed off the strip of land to the south, but only occupied the right bank of the Danube and the Sava, allowing the encampment of the crusaders on the other side.



The Danube, along which Hunyadi intended to take succour to the defenders of the castle, was sealed off above Zimony (Zimun) by a Turkish fleet of some two hundred ships. The ships were linked by chains, forming a pontoon bridge that put up an apparently impassable obstacle. The crucial question for the ultimate outcome of the siege seemed to be whether Hunyadi would somehow manage to break through the ship-barrier. If not, the defenders' fate was sealed.

The Ottomans placed their cannon in palisade-fortified batteries and started firing on the castle. Twenty-seven siege guns, several mortars, many smaller cannon and other military engines unceasingly battered the walls. The defenders returned fire, and made frequent sorties to disturb the besiegers. Defence was made more difficult by the rapid depletion of food stocks, and by an epidemic which decimated the defenders. Although the garrison never let up in their attempts to stop the gaps opened up by the cannonballs, the Turkish siege guns had caused severe damage to the castle walls and towers by 14 July. Hunyadi's intervention became crucial, but this required some way of breaking through the river barrier. This was the first decisive moment of the battle.

Hunyadi had already gathered together all of the boats of various sizes used by Danube traders, and had his carpenters transform them into improvised war vessels. He strengthened their bows and then filled them with well-equipped soldiers. He also secretly warned the defenders to attack the Turkish fleet from behind at the given moment.





THE TURKISH CHRONICLES ALSO RECORD JOHN HUNYADI'S VICTORY.
THE MINIATURE OF THE BATTLE OF NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR IS
FROM A CHRONICLE IN THE TOPKAPI SERAY MUSEUM

Then on 14 July, Hunyadi floated his boats towards the Ottoman pontoons, his cavalry securing both banks against any Ottoman intervention. At the same time, the boats prepared in Nándorfehérvár also attacked the Turks, and in a bloody struggle lasting several hours, managed to break their chains and disperse them. The tactical significance of breaking through the Ottoman embargo was that it opened the way for reinforcements delivered by water. Hunyadi immediately sent his best forces into the besieged castle, thus doing more than just reviving the defenders' sagging morale. The successful action meant that there were now more than ten thousand well-equipped soldiers awaiting the Ottomans when they launched their main assault. Hunyadi stationed the remaining crusaders on the left bank of the Sava, which the Sultan had left unguarded.

Mehmed was being pressed by time, by the epidemic, and by inadequate food supplies. He continued to fire on the castle, which despite constant reconstruction was effectively reduced to a ruin within a week. On 20 July, the Sultan called a halt to the barrage, the sign that the general assault was about to begin. At that, Hunyadi brought more of his crusaders into the castle to reinforce its defence.





JOHN OF CAPISTRANO
ENCOURAGES HUNGARIAN
SOLDIERS TO FIGHT.
PAINTING ENTITLED
"JOHN HUNYADI'S FIGHT
AT NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR
(BELGRADE) AGAINST THE
OTTOMANS" BY JOSEPH
BRENNER, 1851 (MHIM)



TITUSZ DUGOVICS' SACRIFICE.
PAINTING BY SÁNDOR WAGNER, 1859 (HNG)



THE BATTLE OF NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR



On the evening of 21 July, the Sultan's elite units, who until then had had no duties, mounted an assault under artillery cover. They filled the ditches with earth and brushwood, and soon made their way through the gaps in the ruined walls, into the town. Despite heroic resistance by the defenders, the Turks gained an increasing superiority, whereupon Hunyadi, at the head of armoured knights held in reserve in the castle, executed a counter-attack and forced them out of the town. The Janissaries launched a second assault, and it was only after murderous hand-to-hand combat and serious casualties that they were once again repelled.

The third assault took place around midnight, when the Turks pressed the defenders all the way to the castle gate. The situation became critical, but in the meantime another wave of crusaders arrived from the river and into the castle. According to legend, Titusz Dugovics took hold of the Turkish soldier who was attempting to set the flag of the Prophet on the gate tower, and threw him to the ground. Finally, the fire raining down on them from all sides and the bitter resistance of the defenders forced the Turks to withdraw a third time, and by dawn the town was again in Christian hands. A large part of the Sultan's infantry had been destroyed in the bloody struggle, but the cavalry (the Spahis) were effectively undamaged.

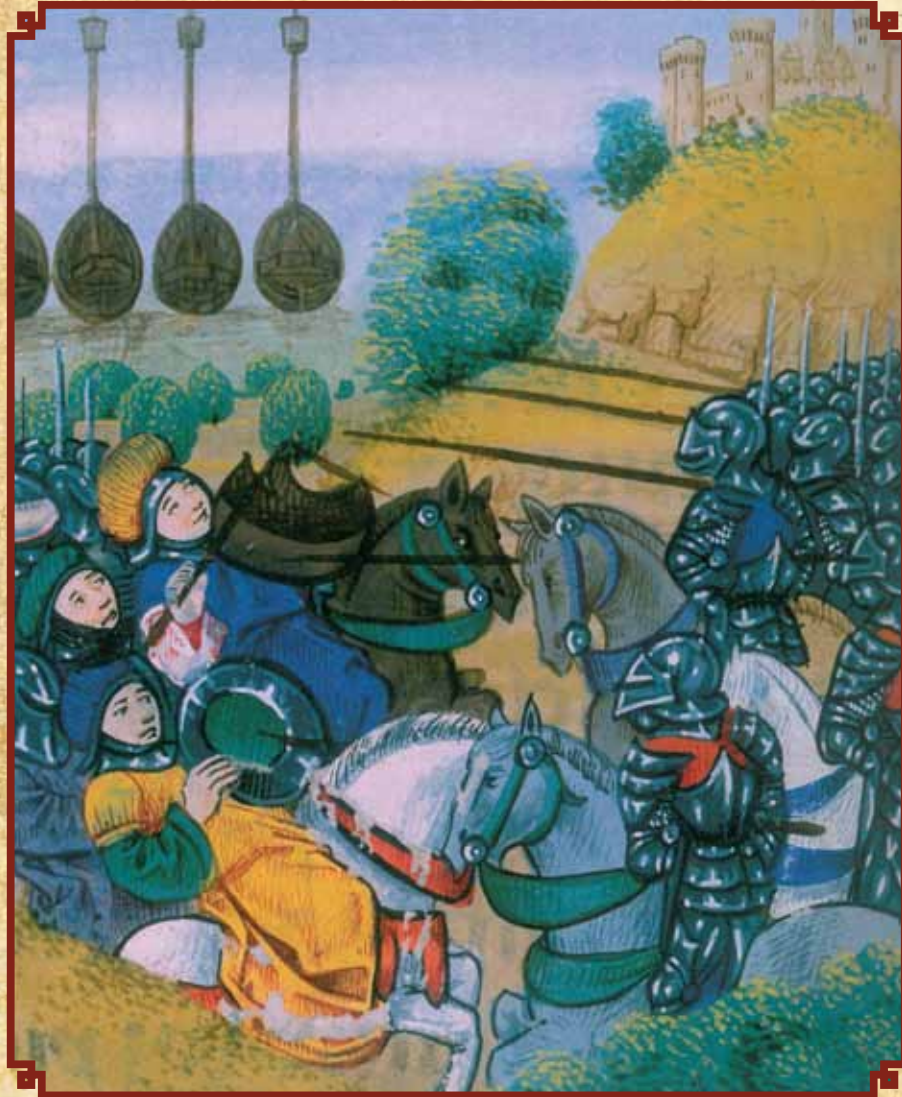




"LANC WAS THRUST AT LANCE, ONE OF A HERO, THE OTHER OF A WARRIOR."
DUEL BETWEEN HIGH-RANKING HUNGARIAN AND TURKISH SOLDIERS. THE PICTURE
FAITHFULLY REPRESENTS WESTERN AND EASTERN ARMS AND BATTLEDRESS

This was the reason, apart from the serious losses among the defenders, why Hunyadi did not pursue the Janissaries who now sought refuge behind their guns. Hunyadi was concerned that the Sultan would order another assault, but something completely different happened. Next morning, the crusaders camped on the left bank of the Sava, who had not been fighting the day before, crossed the river in small groups and started fighting with the Turks. They were soon followed by more troops, and then the crusaders in the town also went on to the attack, and with their combined strength they captured the camp of the Anatolian corps. The Sultan responded by leading the rested Rumelian corps in an attack on the crusaders, who were saved from certain destruction by Hunyadi's brilliant appraisal of the situation. Mehmed had left no guard on his cannon, which Hunyadi, bursting out of the castle at the head of his cavalry, captured and turned against the Turks. This was the second decisive moment of the battle. Although the Turks tried three times to regain their guns, the Christians managed to fend them off, using the gun emplacements the attackers had constructed.

This decided the battle, because without infantry and cannon, the Sultan could not even consider continuing the siege. Mehmed gave the order to retreat, and in the night of 23-24 July, the Ottoman army abandoned the siege and left the field. Hunyadi wanted to take advantage of the moment and launch a great campaign to force the Ottomans out of Europe once and for all. His call once again failed to arouse the support of the leading powers of the continent. Ladislas V eventually set off to the south at the head of mercenaries and German crusaders, but without much resolve. Additionally, the raging epidemic and the rising social dissatisfaction obliged Hunyadi and Capistrano to immediately release the crusaders camping under Nándorfehérvár. By the time the King arrived at the castle, Hunyadi was no longer among the living: he fell to the plague on 11 August. With his death, the idea of offensive action against the Ottomans came off the agenda for a long time.



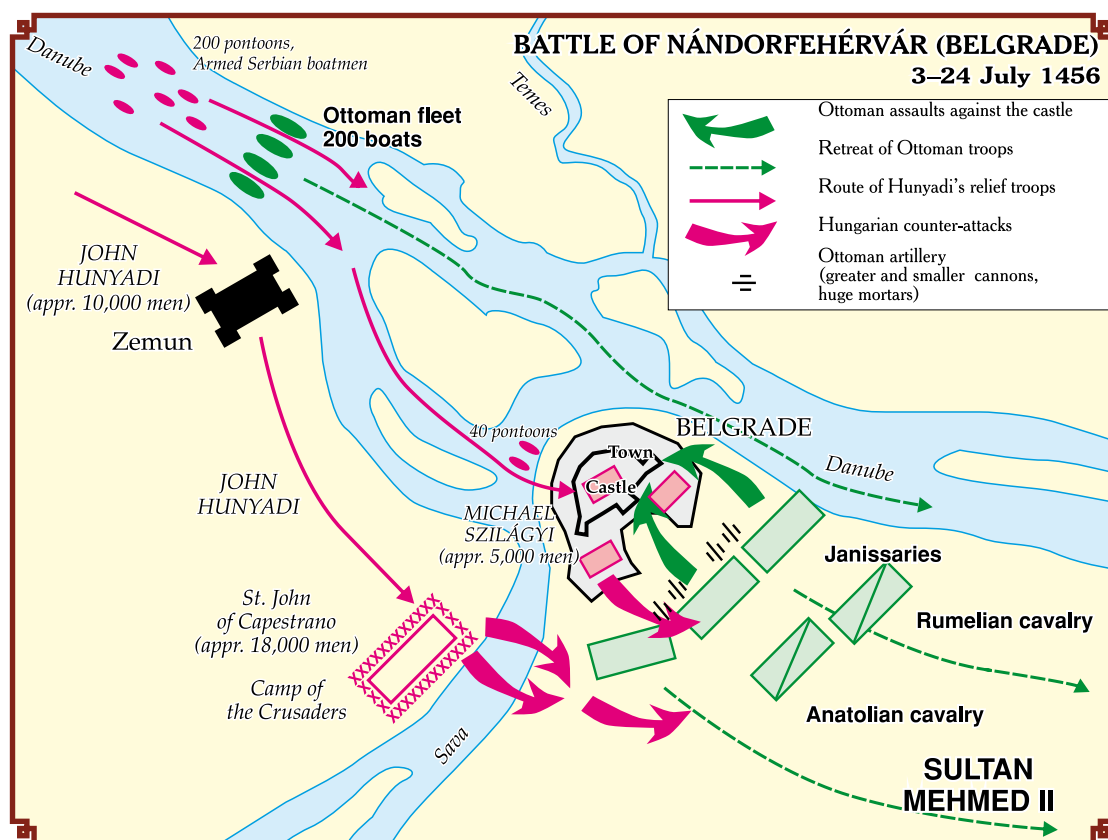
IDEALISED REPRESENTATION OF THE BATTLE BETWEEN HUNGARIAN ARMoured KNIGHTS AND TURKISH HORSEMEN IN A 15TH-CENTURY FRENCH MINIATURE, CHRONICLE OF THE TIMES OF CHARLES VII



TURKISH AND HUNGARIAN WARRIORS ON THE CALVARY ALTAR IN SELMEČBÁNYA (BANSKÁ ŠTIAVNICA, SLOVAKIA) BY THE MS MASTER



The Battle of Nándorfehérvár is undoubtedly one of the most glorious events of Hungarian medieval military history, and the peak of Hunyadi's career as a commander. It would be erroneous, however, to claim that the defeat set back the momentum of Ottoman expansion for decades. Despite the serious losses at Nándorfehérvár, Ottoman strength was not broken, and they were threatening Hungary's borders again only two years later. They did not attempt anything like the siege of Nándorfehérvár for a long time, but prepared the ground for later conquest by systematic destruction of the south of Hungary. None of this detracts from the merits of the



MAP: BÉLA NAGY



heroic defenders. Nándorfehérvár was the most important component of the southern Hungarian line of defence, and its loss in 1521 led quickly to the catastrophe of Mohács. In this light, the achievements of the defending army and of Hunyadi deserve every accolade.

John Hunyadi (c. 1407 – 11 August 1456) was a general (1444–1446) and Regent-Governor (1446–1453) of the Kingdom of Hungary. Hunyadi is widely celebrated as a successful and powerful generalissimo. He promoted a revision of dated military doctrine and was an outstanding and iconic military opponent of the Ottoman Empire. Hunyadi was, in a sweeping scope of European military history, the pre-eminent strategist and tactician of the 15th century in Christendom. He was also a Voivode of Transylvania (1440–1456), and father of the Hungarian king, Matthias Corvinus. Hunyadi's military genius, prowess and wherewithal to prosecute preventive and aggressive crusading warfare policies welded together many Christian nationalities against the onslaught of the vastly numerically superior Ottoman Muslim forces. Hunyadi's leadership achieved a state of integrity, stalemate and détente for the Hungarian Kingdom and the many European states that lay to its periphery. Hunyadi's aim to re-organize the military forces of Hungary from strictly a feudal-based aristocratic levy into an efficient and professional standing army would bring reform to European military components in a 'post-Roman' European war-making society. These reforms were further developed by his successor and son King Matthias Corvinus who took them to their ultimate culmination with the Black Army of Hungary. Hunyadi is renowned as one of the greatest Medieval field commanders of all time: his victory over Mehmed II at the Siege of Belgrade in 1456 against overpowering odds is regarded as a seminal piece of European military history. He was awarded the title *Athleta Christi* (Champion of Christ) by Pope Pius.



STATUE TO JOHN OF CAPISTRANO IN THE BUDA CASTLE DISTRICT.
SCULPTED BY JÓZSEF DAMKÓ IN 1922 (PHOTO: PÉTER SZIKITS)

John of Capistrano (Giovanni da Capestrano, 1386–1456) was born into a family which had come to Naples with Louis of Anjou. After his studies in Roman law and canon law, he held municipal offices in Naples and Perugia. When a prisoner of Carlo Malatesta, he decided to break from the world, and after his release entered the Observant Franciscan friary of Perugia. After his ordination as a priest in 1418, he spent a short time in the Mantua court of Pope Martin V, and then as a Franciscan priest engaged in tireless activity in preaching and inquisition. His aim was to purify the faith and reinforce the papacy, which had been weakened by schism and the Conciliar Movement. His activity was confined to Italy until 1451, when he took his preaching beyond the Alps. From then until 1454, he delivered sermons on the renewal of the religious life of the clergy and the lay people and the fight against the Hussites. In 1454, he devoted all of his strength to the idea of a holy war against the Ottomans. In that year, he preached at the Imperial Diet in Frankfurt, and the next year in the Wiener Neustadt court of Emperor Frederick III. He proclaimed a Crusade in the southern counties of Hungary in 1456, mobilising several thousand volunteers with his rousing speeches. Shortly after Hunyadi, he died in Újlak (now Uilac, Serbia) on 23 October 1456. The lord of the town, Miklós Újlaki, ordered the miracles occurring at his grave to be recorded. Many of his sermons, letters and theological treatises have survived. He was canonised in 1690.

*Excerpt from Tamás Pálosfalvi *"Nikápolytól Mohácsig 1396–1526"*
(From Nicopolis to Mohács 1396–1526.
Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 2005)

FROM THE CHRONICLE OF JÁNOS THURÓCZY*

“Some said of the Emperor’s (Sultan’s) flight that in the midst of the bitterest *melée* of the battle the Emperor was preparing his bodyguards for combat, when he was wounded by an arrow in his chest, collapsed half-dead, and his bodyguards carried him in their arms to his tent. When night came, and the Turks saw that the Voivode of Anatolia and indeed all of his lieutenants had died in the battle, and that they had suffered a very great defeat, and that the Emperor himself was almost bereft of life, hardly breathing: they took fright, thinking that the Hungarians would attack them at dawn, and started to flee, carrying the Emperor with them... And when the Emperor came to his senses and asked where he was, and they told him, he asked, “Why and how did we get here?” “The Hungarians have defeated us,” they replied, “and the Voivode of Anatolia, indeed nearly all of the captains of your army have fallen...” And when the Emperor asked whether they had left the cannon and the other siege machines there, they replied that everything had remained there. The Emperor, with a deeply embittered heart, said, “Bring me poison that I may drink, I would rather die than return humiliated to my country.”

*Excerpt from Tamás Pálosfalvi
“Nikápolytól Mohácsig 1396–1526”
 (From Nicopolis to Mohács 1396–1526.
 Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 2005)



ACCORDING TO HIS CHRONICLERS, MEHMED II ANNEXED 200 TOWNS AND 12 COUNTRIES TO HIS EMPIRE, THEREBY EARNING THE TITLE “CONQUEROR”. THE DEFEAT AT NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR, HOWEVER, STOPPED HIS EMPIRE FROM EXPANDING FURTHER INTO EUROPE FOR DECADES



BELGRADE CASTLE (NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR) IS TODAY A FAVOURITE TOURIST DESTINATION



HUNYADI'S ARMY. MURAL IN A HALL OF THE PARLIAMENT ,
PAINTED BY GÉZA UDVARY (PHOTO: PÉTER SZIKITS)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUNGARIAN MILITARY ORGANISATION IN THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES*



KNIGHTS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

As compared to armies of small combat effectiveness based on the Angevin-era honour system, we see armies of completely different composition in the western campaigns of Hungarian King Louis I (1342–1382). The core of these armies was made up of mercenary companies of heavy cavalry organised and led by knights serving in the royal court. This marked the appearance of the institution of *dispositio*, which was then employed right up to the end of the Middle Ages. Under *dispositio*, the court knights received bounty from the King to employ a certain number of soldiers. The basic unit of such companies, on the Western pattern, was the *lancea* consisting of one knight in full armour and two or three light horsemen. Similar formations were also raised by the barons, and these later developed into the fixed-strength baronial militias. Armies raised in this way were supplemented by a substantial number of Western (Italian and German) mercenaries. Several mercenary generals, such as the Austrian Ellerbachs and the Cillis of Styria, received estates in Hungary and became absorbed into the Hungarian aristocracy. The armoured knights – even the Hungarians – fought with the standard armament of the time: helmet, mail (subsequently plate armour), lance, long, straight sword and mace.

The Angevin-era Hungarian armies were complemented by various lightly-armed auxiliary troops. Such were the Cumans, who made a big impression in Italy with their attire and their behaviour. Similar mounted archery tactics were employed by the Székely soldiers, and there were light-cavalry contingents contributed by the Angevin kings' occasional Balkan allies. The main strength of such troops was lightning attacks, and they were of little use in regular battles. Most of the military equipment (such as siege engines) were made and operated by foreigners (although in the 15th century the munitions industry flourished in Hungarian towns).



Under Louis the Great, Hungarian armies were fighting somewhere nearly every year, often led by the King himself. Despite occasional defeats, the Hungarian King held the initiative on every front, and even the failure of his Neapolitan plans was due to political rather than military factors. The second half of the 14th century was thus a period of unmatched success in Hungarian military history. Louis I's ability to wage war so aggressively, and mostly successfully, was principally down to two factors: the enormous royal estates and an unlimited treasury of precious metals. These resources were no longer available to his successors. In this respect, the military history of the hundred and fifty years between the death of Louis in 1382 and Mohács may be looked on as a series of increasingly desperate efforts to make up for dwindling material resources. As the resources required for war depleted, Hungary was forced on to the defensive, first against the threatening advance of the Ottoman Turks in the south-east, and then against the Bohemian Hussites in the north-west. Despite Sigismund's war with Venice, John Hunyadi's campaigns against the Turks and Matthias' conquests in the west, Hungary was never again able to retain the initiative as it had for many decades under the Angevin kings.

At the end of the century, following the defeat at Nicopolis, Sigismund was forced to make reforms. First of all, citing the Turkish peril, he suspended the relevant clauses of the Golden Bull and obliged the nobles to rise to the defence of the kingdom at any time, even beyond its borders if necessary. He also specified that they had to raise one archer for every twenty peasants (this was the *militia portalis*) for military campaigns, at their own expense. These reforms did not, however, affect the most formidable part of the Hungarian army, which developed unbroken from its Angevin-era origins. The King's, Queen's, prelates' and baronial *banderia*



(militias) still consisted of professional soldiers paid from monies from the central treasury. Baronial militias could still only be kept by the country's "real" barons, i.e. those who actually held office and thus contributed to their soldiers' pay from their own revenues. Sigismund was the first Hungarian king who tried to regulate the provisioning of the army by law, fixing, for example, the price to be paid for basic foods.

In 1435, Sigismund promulgated further reforms. He subordinated soldiers raised under the *militia portalis* to the county *ispán* (*comes*), an arrangement which evolved, in the Jagiello Era, into the county militia. His plan was probably to replace the useless noble levée with professional soldiery to some extent. This plan did not bear fruit, but he had more lasting success with the system of border forts in the south-east. Throughout his long reign, Sigismund built up a defensive line which, with some later additions, was to provide Hungary's defence against the Ottomans right up



BATTLE SCENE FROM THE THURÓCZY CHRONICLE



to Mohács. The garrisons of these defensive forts formed the germ of the standing Hungarian army. From the outset, the maintenance of the forts and the pay of their garrisons consumed enormous sums, between twenty and fifty per cent of the king's revenue. It was also under Sigismund that the artillery started to develop in Hungary. The king had his own cannon (*bombarda*) which could be sent to where they were needed either overland (by cart) or by water. That is when the sources start to mention royal and municipal cannon masters and handguns (*pixides*) started to become common. The French traveller Bertrandon de la Brocquiere was very complimentary about the cannon he saw at Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) in 1433.

The reign of Wladislas I and the regency of John Hunyadi brought simultaneous progress and setbacks for the Hungarian military. The great campaigns against the Ottomans accelerated the use of mercenaries, the noble levée being inadequate for these. The constant civil wars and the foreign invasion of much of the country, however, meant that there was insufficient revenue for hiring professional infantry or acquiring artillery. It is therefore not surprising that Hunyadi's western campaigns (against Frederick of Germany and the Cilli counts) brought no tangible result.

The true – if transitory – turning point in the history of the Hungarian army was the accomplishment of King Matthias. He made no fundamental changes to military institutions: he made frequent use of baronial and ecclesiastical militias, as he did of the noble levée and the militia portalis, although only until 1471. In early 1472, he declared in terms that brooked no contradiction that against the kingdom's enemies every prelate, baron and noble was bound by their oath of allegiance to gather in the King's camp with his *banderia*. The core of the barons' *banderia*



were the retainers, the minor nobles who entered the barons' service, and when the army was mobilised they were joined by mercenaries recruited with the King's money. The leaders of the affiliated provinces also kept permanent troops under arms against payment (the Ban of Croatia-Slavonia had 500 horsemen, for example). Matthias also paid bounty to Croatian and Serbian aristocrats. The former provided defence of the Croatian-Slavonian frontiers (their own estates), and the latter supplied the King with the *rác* (Serbian) light horsemen essential in the Turkish wars and also used with success in the western campaigns. Together with the frontier castle garrisons, the baronial *banderia*, kept in arms by the King's money, were the seeds of standing army.

Matthias' greatest innovation was the gradual development of the modern professional army. Forming the backbone of this were the companies of Bohemian, Moravian, Polish and other soldiers who came to Hungary during the Hussite Wars and were taken into service by the King after 1462. After he embarked on his western conquests, Matthias also frequently employed mercenaries on Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian lands. Most Bohemian and Silesian mercenaries served as heavy cavalry, but some of them were infantry, alongside Germans and even a very small number of Swiss. The soldiers in the army, as it became a professional force, were by no means purely foreign. From the 1430s onwards, chiefly to meet the needs of the consecutive Hussite Wars, an increasing number of Hungarian minor and middle nobles found a living in war, such as the poor Kalászi family of Nyitra (Nitra) County, whose members served as paid soldiers in four different baronial *banderia* in the 1450s.

*Excerpt from Tamás Pálosfalvi
"Nikápolytól Mohácsig 1396–1526"
 (From Nicopolis to Mohács, 1396–1526.
 Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 2005)



SILVER CROSS OF THE HUNGARIAN CORONATION (13TH CENTURY). THE KINGS
SWORE THE OATH ON THIS IN THE CORONATION CEREMONY



THE HISTORY OF THE HUNGARIAN HOLY CROWN AND CORONATION INSIGNIA IN THE MODERN AGE*





The trials of the Hungarian Holy Crown and coronation insignia continued into the modern age. King John Zápolya and Péter Perényi, the surviving general of the catastrophe at Mohács, were at that time the Guards of the Holy Crown, and had easy access to Visegrád, the place where it was traditionally kept. He and Perényi were of the same party at that time, but after his coronation, Perényi switched allegiance to Ferdinand, taking the Holy Crown with him. After Ferdinand's coronation at Székesfehérvár, the crown was probably again returned to Visegrád and held there until 1529. In that sad year, there was another humiliation for the Holy Crown: János Bánffi, of the Zápolya party, captured the Guard of the Crown, Péter Perényi, as he fled the Turks with the crown, and surrendered both Perényi and the crown to the invading Sultan Suleiman. Suleiman passed on the Holy Crown to Zápolya, who presented himself as a vassal. The Holy Crown remained with John until his death, but his widow Queen Isabella made peace with Ferdinand I in 1551 through the intercession of George Martinuzzi and presented him with the crown. This was the confirmation that she, her son John Sigismund and all of their descendants renounced the Hungarian throne to the benefit of Ferdinand and his successors. The Holy Crown was received by General Castaldo of the Imperial Army and a company of Spanish and Hungarian cavalry, who took it to Pozsony (now Bratislava, Slovakia), where Ferdinand was attending the Hungarian Diet. Ferdinand did not keep the Holy Crown permanently in Hungary. The large part of the realm which had fallen under Turkish control included the places where the Holy Crown and coronation insignia had been kept. Ferdinand immediately had them taken to Vienna, although for most of the Habsburg Era, they were kept in the sturdy castle of Pozsony, occasionally being transported to Vienna or even Prague, the favoured seat of the Habsburgs at that time, because the king wished to have them in his current place of residence or it was necessary to keep them in safety against the Turkish peril or the attacks of the King's sometimes rebellious subjects.



With the coming of more settled times, the Peace of Vienna of 1606 obliged Matthias, the heir apparent, to return the Holy Crown to Hungary and keep it in Pozsony (Act 4 of 1606). The same Act named the Holy Crown *corona regni*, Crown of the Realm. Rudolf had hitherto kept the Holy Crown in Prague Castle, his permanent residence, and did not wish to relinquish it, but was eventually forced to submit at the urging of Crown Prince Matthias. Matthias would have preferred to keep the crown of Hungary in Austria, quite reasonably fearing that in Hungary it might fall into the hands of a rebel who could then have himself crowned king. After much wrangling, the wishes of the kingdom prevailed: on 12 June 1608, Rudolf, with great ceremony, presented the case containing the Holy Crown to Crown Prince Matthias and the large and splendidly-armed Hungarian noble deputation escorting him, and after the coronation, Matthias II, as laid down in Act 16 of the post-coronation laws of 1608, had the Holy Crown, together with the coronation insignia, taken to Pozsony Castle.

In 1618, during the Bethlen Uprising, the Guard of the Crown, Péter Révay, was forced to give up the crown to the rebels, who took it to the castle of Zólyom (Zvolen, Slovakia). As Ferdinand forced Bethlen to retreat, the crown was taken to Kassa (Košice, Slovakia), Eperjes, and finally to Ecsed in Szabolcs County. Possession of the Holy Crown returned to Ferdinand II in June 1621 under the Peace of Nikolsburg.

Although the Hungarian estates had elected Bethlen King, they had not crowned him, even though he was in possession of the crown. During the tempestuous years of 1691–1622, the Guard of the Holy Crown, Count Péter Révay, remained constantly beside the crown and followed it everywhere until, after handing it over to the agent of Ferdinand II in 1622, he died. Tumultuous rejoicing greeted the crown as it was returned to Pozsony with full official ceremony.



KING STEPHEN'S CORONATION ROBE, THE CROWN ATTRIBUTED TO HIM
(11TH -12TH CENTURY) AND THE SCEPTRE.
THESE CORONATION INSIGNIA REPRESENT THE ÁRPÁD ERA



In 1644, during the uprising of Prince George I Rákóczi of Transylvania, the crown left Pozsony again and was held in the castle of Győr, protected by the Danube.

The Crown next had to be taken to safety in 1683, despite a law of 1659 which re-established the prohibition of its removal from the kingdom. The Turkish army was marching against Vienna along the left bank of the Danube, with Pozsony in its path, and the crown was taken first to Linz and then to Passau. After the relief of Vienna and the triumphant expulsion of the Turks, the crown was returned to Pozsony, where it remained until 1703. Its removal to Vienna at that time was officially necessitated by a lightning strike on Pozsony Castle which burned down the castle tower, but in the midst of Francis II Rákóczi's War of Independence, the move may have seemed advisable for other reasons. By 1712, the crown had returned to Pozsony and stayed there until 1784, apart from a brief period during the War of the Austrian Succession when it was guarded in the well-defended castle of Komárom, further from the border.



STATUE OF STEPHEN AND GISELLA IN VESZPRÉM CASTLE, BY JÓZSEF ISPÁNKY, 1938 (PHOTO: VERONIKA DÉVÉNYI)



SWORD ATTRIBUTED TO KING STEPHEN (12TH CENTURY), NOW HELD IN THE TREASURY OF ST VITUS' CATHEDRAL IN PRAGUE



In one of the saddest periods in its history, the Holy Crown languished in the court treasury in Vienna for six years between 13 April 1784 and 17 February 1790, after Emperor Joseph II decreed it be stored there together with the crowns of his other kingdoms. It was put in the care of two supremely loyal chief guards – one of them was Count Ferenc Balassa. The crown jewels were effectively stolen. It was among the greatest rejoicing that the crown was brought home in a veritable triumphal march in 1790. Without going into the details of the celebrations, it is worth noting the presence of the Croatian nobility, who still felt themselves as one with the Hungarians. Indeed the delegates of Zagreb County even wore Hungarian ceremonial dress to the Diet which received the crown. The crown was taken to Buda, put on public display for three days, and only then placed in the royal castle of Buda, where it is still held today. “Long live Hungarian liberty!” was the watchword ringing out all over the kingdom on the return of the Holy Crown, and the finest Hungarian poets of the day wrote verses to “our glorious crown”, “the holy gift from the heavens”. Historians produced a whole literature on the story of the Holy Crown.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the Holy Crown had to be taken to safety again: from Buda to Mohács in 1805, and to Eger and Gyöngyös in 1809.

During the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849, Kossuth and his government took the crown and coronation insignia with them when they had to flee the army of Windischgrätz in December 1848. Packed on to a cart and taken with great difficulty across the half-finished Chain Bridge, whose deck consisted of no more than wooden planks, the crown jewels were then loaded on to a special train in Pest, escorted by crown-guard grenadiers, first to Szolnok and then to Debrecen. The story is well known of how, after the catastrophe of Világos, Bertalan Szemere, Minister of the Interior, together with three associates, buried a case containing the crown and insignia beside an abandoned



house near Orsova to prevent it falling into the hands of the imperial troops. Judging the place to be inadequate, however, they dug it up again next day, and along the road to Wallachia, two young men buried it again among the willows, and left it there. The Holy Crown was next found in spring 1853, in a special case which had preserved it unharmed, but the sword was severely rusted and St Stephen's cloak had suffered much in the damp soil of the woods. From there, an Austrian warship bore it to Buda-Pest, where Archduke Albert, the Emperor's governor, and Cardinal János Scitovszky received it among popular rejoicing on a scale matching that of 1790. It was put on public display, but only for three days, whereafter it was taken on to Vienna, because Francis Joseph wanted to see for himself that the true insignia had been found. The Holy Crown travelled to Vienna by train under the personal escort of Cardinal Scitovszky, who showed it from the windows of the carriage at every station along the way and gave the people his blessing. In Vienna, the young emperor had it taken into the court chapel, held a ceremonial Te Deum above it, and then sent it back to Buda.

On the celebration of Hungary's millennium in 1896, the Holy Crown was taken around the streets of Budapest on the royal carriage, once again on display to the Hungarian people, who viewed it with deep and undiminished devotion.

*Excerpt from Emma Bartoniek
“A magyar királykoronázások története”
 (The History of the Hungarian Royal Coronations.
 Reissued by Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987)



ANNA KUBINYI:
WOUNDED BIRD (FABRIC)



“ALL MEANS MAY BE
DEPLOYED
IN HUNGARY...” – 1956





MASS DEMONSTRATION OF SOLIDARITY
WITH POLISH PEOPLE AT THE BEM STATUE ON THE AFTERNOON OF 23 OCTOBER



“ALL MEANS MAY BE DEPLOYED IN HUNGARY...”



The events in Poland in 1956 undoubtedly took effect on the situation in Hungary, and in several respects. News of the Poznań events and subsequent reprisals, and the events of the second half of October, spread through Hungary. In addition, what the Soviet leadership had learned in “solving the Polish crisis” affected the political plans for “settling the Hungary question.” Having placed the Soviet forces on combat alert on 19 October and at the same time issued instructions to the Hungarian People’s Army connected with deployment of Soviet units, they were in a good position to deal with unexpected events in Hungary.

Khrushchev had indicated several times before 1956 that the Soviet Union was prepared to employ any means that might be necessary in Hungary’s case. It was in direct response to the Polish workers’ protests in Poznań on 28 June 1956 that instructions – in serious contravention of international treaties at that time – were issued to Lt General P. N. Lashchenko, commander of the Special Corps stationed in Hungary, to prepare a plan for the deployment of Soviet troops “to maintain, protect, and if necessary restore, the Socialist social order.”

The plan, codenamed Volna (Wave), assigned protection of the major installations in Budapest to the 2nd Mechanised Guard Division, while the main forces of the 17th Mechanised Division would seal off the Austrian border. This plan for the use of Soviet forces for security operations is clear evidence that unlimited use of force was the means preferred by the top Soviet political leadership for dealing with a political crisis in Hungary. Some Hungarian political leaders also knew that Soviet military forces could be used for security purposes in the country if necessary.

On 16 October, an initiative modelled on the youth of March 1848 started out in Szeged, under the slogan, What does the Hungarian Nation wish? Foreign policy demands included a review of Soviet–Hungarian foreign trade treaties



on an equal basis and the withdrawal of all Soviet forces under the terms of the peace treaty. The students also demanded a new national coat of arms and military uniforms.

Organisation of the demonstration continued on 23 October, in line with the students' decisions of the previous day. The Minister of the Interior banned the march and threatened to prevent the demonstration by armed force if necessary. The Party and the government were playing with fire. At a meeting of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP), György Marosán and József Révai openly declared, “If necessary, we'll have them shot!” The Interior Minister's ban, far from deterring the students, actually hardened their resolve. The demonstration broke down the barrier of fear. The reformist slogans became increasingly bold. “Rákosi into the Danube, Imre Nagy into government!” “If you're Hungarian, come with us!” “Russians go home!” were the chants heard from the crowd, now numbering two hundred thousand, in front of Parliament. Thousands also assembled at other points in Budapest.

Demanded back into the leadership by the masses, Imre Nagy called on the Hungarian youth now demonstrating for socialist democracy to support order and discipline. Events followed quickly on one another. At about the same time as Imre Nagy's speech, the demonstrators pulled down the Stalin statue, and the forces – mainly “state protection” political police (ÁVH) – defending the Radio building opened fire on the still-unarmed demonstrators. After a conversation between Ernő Gerő and Khrushchev, the main Soviet forces based in Hungary started out towards Budapest.

After shots were fired at the Radio building in Budapest, with several fatalities, some civilians started to seek weapons from barracks in and around Budapest and from police station arsenals. Some large Budapest factories also had stores of firearms and ammunition, which were also seized and handed out.



BUDAPEST, 23 OCTOBER. PROTESTERS
LISTENING TO IMRE NAGY'S SPEECH AT PARLIAMENT



BUDAPEST, 23 OCTOBER. REMAINS OF THE DEMOLISHED STALIN-STATUE



BUILDING OF HUNGARIAN RADIO AFTER AN ASSAULT



“ALL MEANS MAY BE DEPLOYED IN HUNGARY...”



DECISION TO DEPLOY THE SOVIET FORCES

At about 11 pm Moscow time (9 pm in Budapest) on 23 October, according to the minutes of the Soviet Politburo, Zhukov informed the meeting that a demonstration of “a hundred thousand” in Budapest had “set fire to the Radio,” and in Debrecen the “county Party committee and the Interior Ministry’s county headquarters have been occupied.” A majority of Politburo members considered this sufficient reason to support Khrushchev’s recommendation that “forces must be sent into Budapest.” To implement its proposals and decisions, the Soviet leadership decided to send Mikoyan and Suslov from the Politburo, General Malinin, First Deputy Commander of the Soviet armed forces and Ivan F. Serov, Director of the KGB, to Hungary. Before taking the final decision, Khrushchev called into the Kremlin Mátyás Rákosi, who was in Moscow at the time, who considered that the Soviet forces should intervene immediately.

It is important to note that, whether the Hungarian political leadership requested the deployment of the Soviet troops on 23 October or merely acknowledged the fact, the majority of them agreed with it. They accepted the “advice” of the Soviet leaders on how to handle the crisis, and regarded the implementation of that advice as binding on themselves. It has been definitely established that the Hungarian leadership did not diverge in any substantial particular from the constraints set by the Soviet leaders, constraints which were modified several times between 23 and 28 October as events unfolded. Until 31 October, the Soviet government regarded the Party leadership under János Kádár, and the state leadership (which formally did not exist) under Imre Nagy, as capable of handling the crisis in a way satisfactory to Soviet interests.



THE ORDER OF SOVIET FORCES INTO BUDAPEST

On 23 October, in line with a decision taken by the Soviet Politburo, the Armed Forces Ministry put the two armoured divisions of the Soviet Special Corps stationed in Hungary on alert – one hour before the political decision was taken –, and ordered the Corps to move its main forces into Budapest, occupy the main points of the city and restore order. The Corps leadership was also assigned the task of using some of its strength to cover itself and its activities from any interference coming from the direction of the Austro-Hungarian border.

The situation became clear to the Soviet military leadership around midday on the 24th. They ascertained that many of the major points were in the hands of the armed groups, the police forces were disorganised and passive, the Hungarian units had not received definite commands to continue active combat, and many soldiers and some organised subunits had changed over to the insurgent side. The total number of armed insurgents in Budapest was estimated at around 2000, the most active – according to their own testimony – being in the 8th and 9th districts.

The Soviet forces in Budapest on 24 October had a total strength of less than a division. The 6000 Soviet troops, 290 tanks, about 120 armoured personnel carriers and 156 guns proved insufficient. 159 fighter planes and 122 bombers were awaiting the order to deploy. In this period of Soviet military operations, the fighters covered the marching columns and the aircraft of the 177th bomber guard division carried out 84 show-of-strength and reconnaissance sorties above Budapest and other cities.



BUDAPEST, 24 OCTOBER.
TANKS BLOCKING THE PEST BRIDGEHEAD OF MARGIT BRIDGE



HUNGARIAN TANK WITH THE KOSSUTH COAT OF ARMS
ON SZABADSÁG (FREEDOM) BRIDGE (AROUND 28 OCTOBER)

On the night of 23-24 October, the 33rd Mechanised Guard Division stationed in Timișoara and the 128th Infantry and 39th Mechanised Guard Divisions in the Carpathian Military Zone (also in Romania) were ordered to Hungary. On October 24 between 00:15 and 7:00 hours, the forces crossed the border unimpeded and assembled in the zone assigned to them. According to Soviet sources, the five divisions put on alert and deployed to “restore order” consisted of 31,500



BUDAPEST, 25 OCTOBER. SOVIET TANKS AND PEACEFUL PROTESTERS
IN FRONT OF PARLIAMENT IN KOSSUTH SQUARE

troops, 1130 tanks and self-propelled guns, 616 artillery pieces and rocket launchers, 185 anti-aircraft guns, 380 armoured personnel carriers and 3830 other vehicles.

In the early hours of 24 October, the armoured vehicles and T-34 tanks of the Soviet Special Corps appeared on the streets of Budapest and started “deterrent” – in fact suicidal – patrols along the main transport routes and intersections of the city.

The tanks and armoured vehicles were sent in repeatedly with disregard for the most basic tactical rules of street-to-street fighting, and without reconnaissance or infantry support – i.e. without hope of victory. The open-topped armoured personnel carriers, without even minimal defences, were sent along narrow streets lined by high buildings which provided the ideal combat terrain for the insurgents, with good manoeuvrability and cover.



BUDAPEST, 27 OCTOBER. WRECKAGE OF SOVIET ANTI-TANK GUNS IN PRÁTER STREET



BUDAPEST, 27-28 OCTOBER. CORVIN PASSAGE AFTER THE FIGHTING



“ALL MEANS MAY BE DEPLOYED IN HUNGARY...”

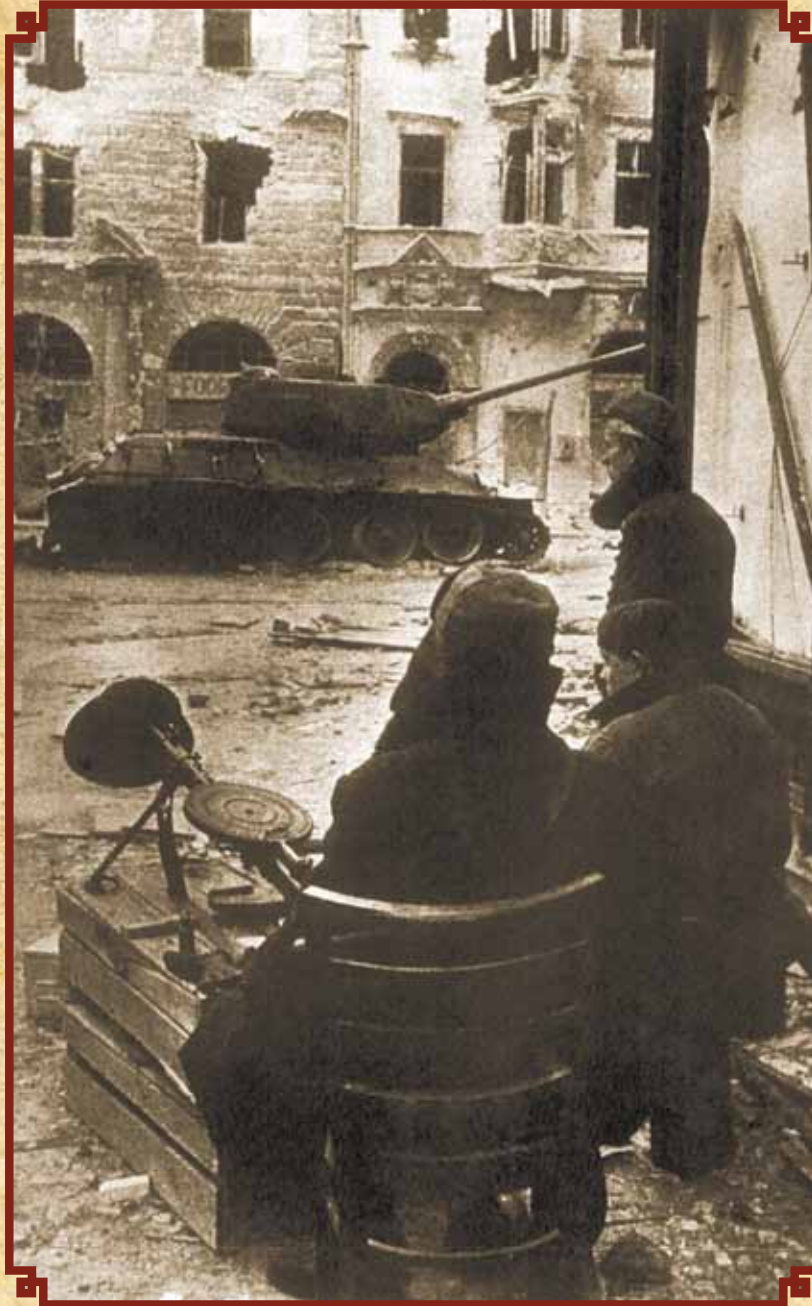


FORMATION OF REBEL/FREEDOM-FIGHTER GROUPS AND THEIR OPERATIONS IN BUDAPEST

The rebels who actually went into combat against the Hungarian and Soviet troops in Budapest in the period from 23 to 29 October numbered a few thousand. They kept solid control of some major intersections and installations and were present nearly everywhere in the city, attacking Soviet and Hungarian armoured vehicles as they moved from place to place, and causing them serious losses. Most of the armed rebels were young workers, a minority were students, and there were quite a large number of teenagers. They took up combat with the Soviet tanks using primitive weapons – small arms and bottles filled with petrol. A crucial factor in their accomplishments was the dependable and practical support of local inhabitants.



MEMBERS OF THE SZÉNA SQUARE GROUP
IN THE COURT OF THE RÁKOSI VILLA



BUDAPEST, 29 OCTOBER. ARMED INSURGENTS OBSERVING JÓZSEF BOULEVARD FROM CORVIN PASSAGE

In Buda, the Széna Square group held that square as well as Moszkva (Moscow) Square and its vicinity until the temporary and partial ceasefire on 27 October, but it carried out operations from the Buda side of Margit Bridge right up to Batthány Square, and along the main road Szilágyi Erzsébet Avenue as far as Szép Ilona garage. In the 8th and 9th districts of Pest, the core of groups largely composed of young workers and students formed in the Corvin Cinema and fought for various periods in the Corvin Passage area and in the buildings facing Ferenc Boulevard, József Boulevard and Üllői Road, all important transport routes for the Hungarian and Soviet forces. There were rebel groups set up by local residents, such as the Práter Street group. Most of the rebel groups were joined by large numbers of primary and secondary school students and industrial apprentices.

The most active fighters were young students and the ‘lads’. Many soldiers who had deserted their units also joined the Corvin Passage bands. Medical students, practising in their chosen profession, stayed with the armed groups, and the National Guard units formed out of these, until hostilities ceased, i.e. until 28-29 October and subsequently until 8-9 November. Those who left were replaced by increasingly younger volunteers, and that was true in both periods.

Contacts within the armed groups were very loose in the 23-28 October period, as might be expected given the nature of the events. Those who took up the struggle against the authorities joined by their own individual decision and were free to decide when and under what circumstances they would leave the fight. When the groups became scattered during the fighting, some members returned to their base to carry on the resistance with their old and new comrades-in-arms. Others joined one of the groups where they happened to be, but there were also many who gave up the fight for good.



The constant fighting, the fear of being caught, the resulting lack of trust, the constantly changing numbers and leaders, the alternating periods of break-up and reorganisation combined to prevent the groups joining into a unified organisation before 28-29 October, the victory of the Revolution.

Rebel/freedom fighter groups were mainly concentrated in Budapest, although there were anti-government armed



RED CROSS VEHICLE GATHERING THE WOUNDED
IN THE BREAK OF FIGHTING



forces which controlled isolated parts of the country. The most active groups outside the capital were in Bács-Kiskun, Győr-Sopron, Heves, Komárom, Nógrád, Somogy, Pest and Veszprém counties.

“CRISIS MANAGEMENT” OPTIONS CONSIDERED BY THE SOVIET AND HUNGARIAN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Hurrying to Budapest from Moscow, Mikoyan and Suslov heard reports from the Soviet Special Corps staff commanding the troops deployed in Budapest and from the Military Committee of the Hungarian Ministry of Defence. They concluded that the “anti-government rebellion” could be cleared up within 24 hours. Listeners to Kossuth Radio were informed at 6:23 am the next day, 25 October, that “at the command of the Ministerial Council... the counter-revolutionary coup attempt was subdued in the early hours of 25 October”. The “counter-revolutionary forces” had been dispersed, and “only some minor armed groups and isolated snipers were still in action.”

None of this, of course, was true, and in a move that betrays the cynicism of the political leadership, the “government” – despite the uncertainty surrounding every aspect of the situation – issued a call for transport to restart and for the workers of offices, institutions and factories to resume their work. The direct consequence of their criminal irresponsibility was the fatal shooting in Kossuth Square, in front of the Parliament building. The massacre which ensued when Soviet soldiers opened fire on the unarmed crowd was directly triggered by shots fired by officers of the Hungarian state protection police (ÁVH).

The Soviet and Hungarian political and military leaders were not prepared for resistance of such force and resolution. For a long time they could not understand why the “tactics” which Soviet troops had employed with such



success in Berlin should have come to grief in Budapest. Repeated attempts by the Soviet and Hungarian military leadership to combine Hungarian infantry forces with Soviet tanks and mechanised units in Budapest all ended in failure.

Faced with the inadequacy of the forces sent to Budapest on 24 October, and having insufficient reserves in



ARMoured PERSONNEL CARRIER, THE "OPEN COFFIN",
DESTROYED BY FREEDOM FIGHTERS IN BUDAPEST



Hungary, the Soviet political and military leaders decided to send several further divisions to Hungary for subsequent operations. After the initial confusion, they built up an increasingly precise picture of the rebel forces. They inferred from this that a concentrated attack on the positions of the principal armed groups could force a turning point in the hostilities. The key condition for putting down the uprising was to break the resistance of the rebel forces in Corvin Passage and its vicinity, which included the Kilián Barracks.

Preparations for the attack started in the Ministry of Defence between 7 and 8 pm on the 27th, when the operation – with the agreement of Soviet and Hungarian military leaders – was entrusted to the commander of the Soviet division based in Dimitrov Square. That division would provide the tanks and armoured personnel carriers for the attack. The 128th Infantry Guard Division, which was operating mostly in Buda, was also to be involved. The Hungarian general staff undertook to place a 300-350-strong unit under the command of the division as infantry support.

At dawn on 28 October, at the time planned for the launch of the attack, General Obaturov sent three T-34 tanks along Üllői Road towards the Boulevard to reconnoitre the Corvin Passage area. When these vehicles did not return an hour and a half later, three T-54s were sent after them. An hour later, one of the T-54s returned intact, the other damaged. The commander of the Soviet tank reported that the T-34s were burning in front the Corvin Cinema, and the rebels had knocked out one of the T-54s too. After the first major losses, the Soviet forces postponed the attack for an indefinite time.

The rebels continued to cause major losses to the Soviet forces, looted Soviet tanks, artillery pieces and other military equipment, and disarmed Soviet soldiers operating individually and in small groups.



THE DIRECT POLITICAL REASONS FOR THE VICTORY OF THE REVOLUTION

The effective fighting by the rebels, the unfitness of the Hungarian forces, and the failure of the Soviet forces all boosted the position of those Hungarian leaders who favoured political means for resolution of the crisis. For the first time, Imre Nagy declared the developments of the previous days a national democratic movement. He said:

“To prevent further bloodshed and enable peace to be established, the Government has ordered a general and immediate ceasefire. It has ordered the armed forces to open fire only if attacked. It also calls on all those people who have taken up arms to refrain from any act of hostility and to immediately surrender their weapons.

Law and order will be restored by a new security force which will immediately be assembled from army and police units and armed squads of workers and young people.

The Hungarian government has agreed with the Soviet government that Soviet troops will immediately start withdrawing from Budapest and will completely evacuate the city when the new security force is formed. The Hungarian government is entering negotiations on relations between the People's Republic of Hungary and the Soviet Union, and one of the items on the agenda is the withdrawal of Soviet military forces stationed in Hungary... After order has been restored, a new, unified state police force will be set up, and the State Protection Authority [ÁVH, the political police] will be abolished. No harm will come to anybody who took part in the armed conflict...”

◀ BUDAPEST, 31 OCTOBER. WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS



BUDAPEST, 28 OCTOBER. REVOLUTION VICTORIOUS!
BOY READING A NEWSPAPER IN BUDAPEST

The Revolution had triumphed. On 28 October, the political leadership ordered an amnesty, declared the restoration of the old national symbol, the “Kossuth coat of arms”, announced 15 March as a national holiday, ordered a general increase in salaries and wage rates, and ended forcible entry into agricultural collectives.

This took the Revolution into a new phase. Under the Hungarian government’s declaration of 28 October, the Soviet military leadership also ordered a ceasefire. In the view of the commander of the Special Corps, Lt.-Gen. Lashchenko, the withdrawal of the Soviet troops had to be ordered in any case owing to the “inertia and passivity of the troops.” The Soviet withdrawal was planned to start at 6 pm on 30 October, but full withdrawal was only completed around midday on the 31st. The staff of the Special Corps moved to the military airfield at Tököl, where a Soviet air squadron was based. The Soviet forces regrouped in their concentration area, 15-20 km from the boundaries of Budapest.



NATIONAL GUARD INVOLVING REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS

For the majority of the Hungarian public, the most important demands were immediate withdrawal of Soviet forces (a deadline of 31 December 1956 was talked of in some quarters); immediate abolition of state security organisations and commencement of a judicial investigation of state security officials; revolutionary control of Hungarian police and military organisations; and the setting up of a National Guard which would incorporate freedom-fighter groups and be the prime guarantee of implementing the other aims.

ONE OF THE BASES OF THE INSURGENTS/FREEDOM FIGHTERS
IN SZÉNA SQUARE, BUDAPEST





On 30 October, representatives from the police, the defence forces and some of the rebel groups met in the building of the Budapest Police Headquarters. They agreed that the most urgent tasks were to organise a revolutionary force with a different composition than its predecessors, and to set up a new central body that would coordinate the organisation of the National Guard and the law enforcement and the security and protective activities of the police and the armed forces. Major-General Béla Király was sent for to coordinate the organisation of the new force. Upon his arrival, he actively took up the work of forming the body which would coordinate and direct the activities of all forces involved in security duties. Király set as among the top priorities of the “operative committee” the replacement of “Soviet guards” in the city with Hungarian soldiers, setting up “joint guard” units – presumably comprising soldiers, policemen and National Guardsmen – to cover the peaceful withdrawal of Soviet forces.

Under the leadership of Maj-Gen. Béla Király, a draft declaration was drawn up and taken to Parliament for approval by delegates. In direct contradiction with the plans and actions prior to 30 October, the rebel groups were to become the main force of the National Guard. In terms of numbers and organisation, an equally important part of the National Guard was to comprise units in universities, workplaces, counties, cities, wards and villages, made up of students, intellectuals and manual workers who had not taken part in the insurgency but wanted to do something in support of the 28 October government programme, the restoration of public order, the defence of revolutionary advances, and the resumption of work.

Béla Király then served as head of the Revolutionary Security Committee, later Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard (appointed by Parliament), and also as military commander of Budapest and Chairman of the Revolutionary Defence Commission. He oversaw the organisation and



command of the new security force and coordinated all of the organisations involved in security operations. The rebels, having fought against the Soviet and Hungarian forces until the victory of the Revolution, now formed up into National Guard units and made extraordinary efforts to defend what the Revolution had achieved. These were the units which put up the most determined resistance against the Soviet forces after 4 November. Outside Budapest, and principally in the villages, the task of the National Guard was to provide security of life and property – to prevent the assets of those agricultural cooperatives which were announcing their dissolution from being carried off before the liquidation procedure, to stop “free robbery”, the settling of personal

NATIONAL GUARDS AND SOLDIERS ON
A T-54 TANK CAPTURED FROM THE SOVIETS





TOP: PROTOTYPE BADGE FOR NATIONAL GUARD
DOWN: NATIONAL GUARDS NEAR KILIÁN BARRACKS

scores, and arbitrary action. They inspected local traffic, goods transport and checked unknown persons, disarmed armed groups not belonging to the National Guard and escorted them to headquarters, and imposed curfews where they were ordered.

To prepare for the mounting threat of a Soviet invasion, emergency and defence plans were drawn up in larger towns and especially in military bases, rehearsal exercises were held, and defensive engineering work was started. This process was halted by the Soviet attack of 4 November. Most of the National Guard units disbanded on 4 November or the following days, although some new groupings appeared at the prompting of the Soviet invasion. Several units took up the struggle against the Soviet forces independently or in cooperation with defence forces and police in the locality, and successfully kept up their resistance for a while.



DECISION ON THE SECOND INTERVENTION

The Revolution was crucially affected by a change in the international constellation at the end of October and first few days of November. Unlike the Soviet Union, the Western powers had been caught completely unaware and unprepared by news of the Hungarian Revolution. For US government circles, who were absorbed with the election campaign, the question was how the Hungarian Revolution would affect international politics and the status of the Soviet Union. In a speech in Dallas on 27 October 1956, John Foster Dulles clearly stated that the United States did not regard either Poland or Hungary as potential allies and would not look favourably on a government with a Soviet border which was hostile or not sufficiently friendly to the Soviet Union. This view was acknowledged by the Soviet leadership two days later as the “position agreed at the highest level”. During these days, the other two Western powers, Britain and France, were preoccupied by the Suez Crisis, the preparations for the attack on Egypt on 29 October, and then the war itself.

On 30 October, hopes of victory for the Revolution were further fired by the Soviet government’s statement that it intended to put its relations with the other socialist countries on a new footing. We know now that the first scarred progeny of the “new relationship” was the collective death sentence passed on the Hungarian Revolution. On 31 October, the Soviet leadership started talks with the countries of the “Socialist Bloc” about preparations for a new Soviet military invasion. On 1 November late in the evening, János Kádár left Parliament with Ferenc Münnich during a meeting between Party leaders and the Chinese Ambassador. At the request of Münnich and Andropov, Kádár accompanied Münnich to the Soviet Embassy, where they got into a Soviet armoured personnel carrier and continued



their journey to Tököl military airfield. From there, a military aircraft took them to Moscow, where they started to assemble a counterrevolutionary government.

On the afternoon of 1 November, the cabinet in Budapest reacted to news of the latest Soviet mobilisation by terminating the Warsaw Pact and announcing Hungary's neutrality. The National Government approached the United Nations and asked for the assistance of the four Great Powers to defend the country's neutrality.

The Special Corps, in their concentration area, had repaired their combat equipment and weapons, manned up their subunits and built up ammunition, fuel and food. On 2 November, Marshall Konyev, Commander-in-Chief of the troops under Warsaw Pact command, arrived in Hungary and told the commanders of the armies and the Corps that the top political leadership of the Warsaw Pact countries had decided on the "military assistance" to be provided to Hungary. Konyev gave the Special Corps the task of dispersing the armed resistance forces in Budapest and disarming units of the Hungarian People's Army. Similar duties were assigned to the 38th Combined Field Army in Transdanubia, and the 8th Mechanised Army in the east of the country. The forces had to be ready for the operation by the evening of 3 November, and operation Vihar ("Whirlwind") would be launched by the code word Grom-444 ("Thunder-444").

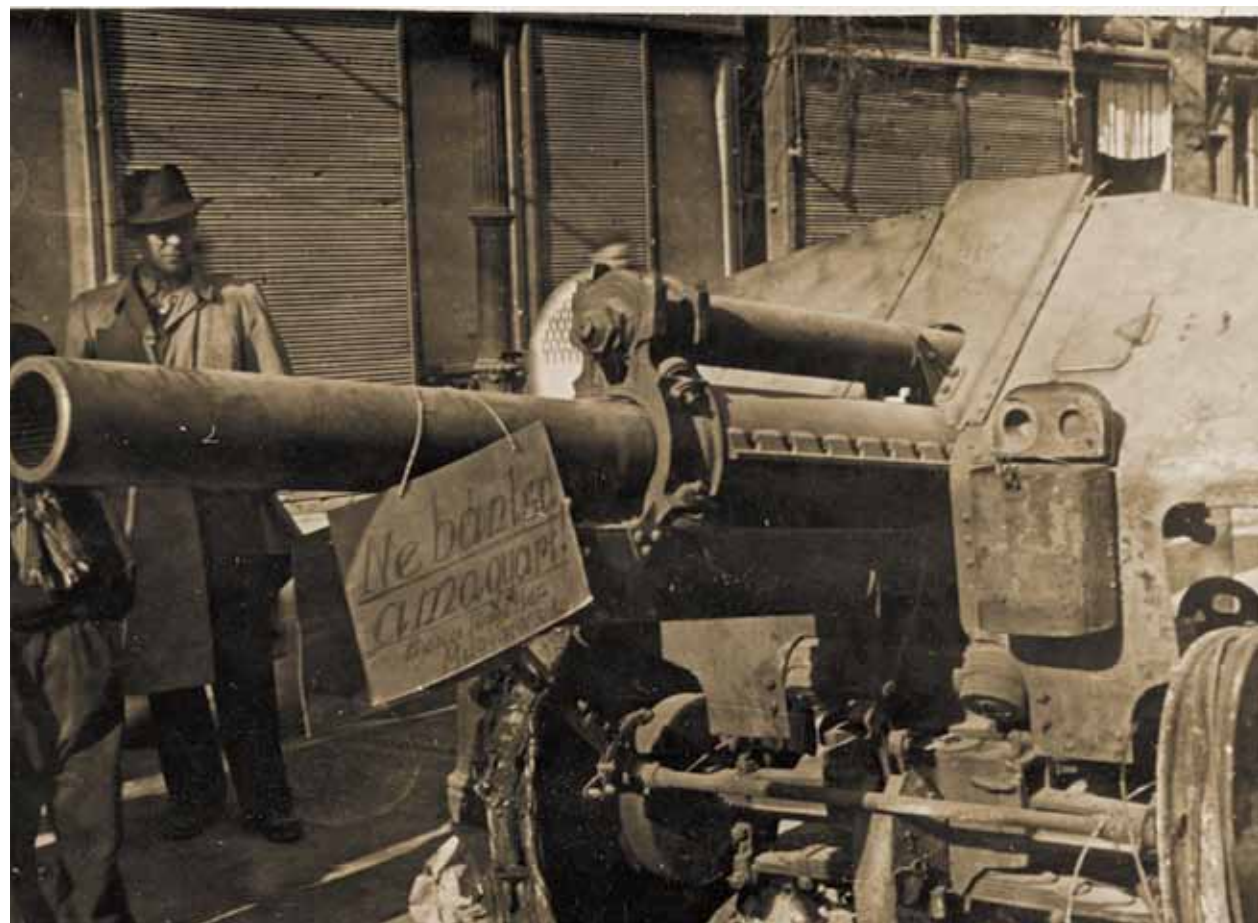
On 2 November, to mislead the Hungarian government, the Soviet political and military leadership proposed that talks should begin with Hungarian government delegates on the withdrawal of Soviet forces. The "decoy" and distracting Soviet-Hungarian talks started at midday on 3 November, where Gen. Malinin outlined the position of the Soviet government. This was that the Soviet government recognised the need to withdraw its forces, and wanted this committee to discuss the technicalities of the withdrawal. Malinin then proposed that the process should begin on



12 November and be completed by 31 January 1957. After setting out these conditions, Malinin stated that the venue for the next meeting would be the Soviet airbase at Tököl, where the Hungarian government delegation would be awaited at 22:00 hours local time.

That evening, the delegates, the military experts and their escorts set out for Tököl. The guard at the gate of the Soviet military base directed the convoy of cars and one radio car to the building designated as the venue for the meeting. The delegates were ushered into a room. The Soviet negotiating delegation was led in by Malinin, and sat down without greeting. The Hungarians took their places with their backs to the door.

IMMOBILIZED 1938M 122MM HOWITZER WITH BURNED-DOWN TYRES
(THE WORDS ON THE TABLE MEAN: DON'T HURT THE HUNGARIANS!)





Just as Pál Maléter started to outline the position of the Hungarian government, Malinin interrupted and apologised that he had not been able to contact his government yet. Before he had even finished his sentence, the door burst open and Lt.-Gen. Serov, head of the Soviet state security service, rushed in with eight state security officers carrying sub-machine guns. They disarmed the Hungarian officers, took their pistols and led them off as prisoners.

The Special Corps, the 8th Mechanised Army and the 38th Combined Field Army were ready to carry out Operation Whirlwind. This involved 17 Soviet divisions – 8 mechanised, 1 armoured, 2 infantry, 2 air defence, 2 air and 2 airborne – comprising some 60,000 Soviet troops.

Before Operation Whirlwind started, the Soviet military command used the radio transmitter taken from the negotiating delegation to mislead the rebel and military forces defending the city. A telegram was sent in the name of Defence Minister Pál Maléter, by then in KGB custody, to the Hungarian People's Army units not to shoot at Soviet forces returning to Budapest.

At that time, columns of tanks, self-propelled artillery and transport vehicles of the Soviet mechanised, armoured and infantry divisions were in battle formation, awaiting the code word.

At 6 am Moscow time and 4 am Hungarian time on 4 November, the code word ("Thunder-444") was issued, and Operation Whirlwind began. The units assigned to occupy the installations identified in the order, and the main forces of the divisions under the command of the Special Corps, broke through the resistance of some of the rebel forces based in the Budapest area and entered Budapest from several directions at 5 am. The armies of Generals Babadjanyan and Mamsurov started the invasion of the country.



It was at about this time – 5:20 am – that Imre Nagy made a statement on Hungarian Radio: "This is Imre Nagy, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Hungary. At dawn, the Soviet forces launched an attack on our capital city with the clear intention of overthrowing the lawful democratic government of Hungary. Our forces have engaged them in combat. The government is in place. This is my message to the people of the country and of the world."



MARTYRS OF THE REVOLUTION. IMRE NAGY (WITH GLASSES) AND HIS ASSOCIATES ON SHOW TRIAL
(PÁL MALÉTER'S FIGURE STANDING OUT IN THE BACKGROUND)



FIGHTING FOR BUDAPEST AFTER ELEVEN YEARS*

On hearing the news of the Soviet attack on 4 November, the Széna Square group in Buda arranged their freedom fighters to control the main roads in the 12th district. At about midday, a unit of about 5 tanks attacked Széna Square and then departed in the direction of Margit Bridge. The rebels retreated from Széna Square towards the Buda Hills. This group engaged with Soviet forces in Solymár on 13 November before being disbanded by its leader, János Szabó.

The heaviest fighting at Móricz Zsigmond Circus was on 4 and 5 November. On the 4th, a former military officer, Jenő Oláh, attempted to coordinate groups fighting independently of each other. An official report sent by the Soviet command stated that 140 Soviet soldiers were killed or wounded in the fighting in the area on the night of 5-6 November. On 6 November in the morning hours, the Soviet forces cleared up the last resistance in the Móricz Zsigmond Circus area.

In Óbuda, Soviet tanks assaulted and ran down the marching column of the 50th Jászberény Artillery Regiment. A group of National Guards took up firing positions on the Buda side of Stalin Bridge. Civilian and military members of the National Guard assembled at Schmidt Castle in Óbuda to fight the Soviets. The fighters there were organised by Defence Force officers and officer cadets, who were prepared for the defence. It was members of this group who blew up a nearby radio jamming station. Next day, the group engaged the Soviet forces. The rebels caused serious Soviet losses, but the commander dissolved the group on 7 November.

As in the period from 24 to 29 October, the Soviet forces encountered the greatest resistance in the 8th and 9th districts. On 4 November at dawn, they attacked National



Guard units there at first with about 15 open armoured vehicles carrying troops from an airborne division and six tanks. The attack came from Nagyvárad Square and Boráros Square, and the main targets were the Corvin Passage regiment, the independent Práter Street National Guard battalion and the Kilián Barracks. The action of various armed groups in the surrounding buildings rendered it impossible to capture Corvin Passage. The Soviet forces withdrew after taking severe losses. They lost 20-30 soldiers during the firefight which lasted until 10 am in the morning.

SOVIET TROOPS ENTERING BUDAPEST
AND STARTING THE VIOLENT OCCUPATION OF THE COUNTRY





The National Guardsmen in Corvin Passage fighting during the first Soviet attack were led by Gergely Pongrátz. The National Guard units here, and in the inner districts, engaged mainly in defensive actions, mainly owing to the greater force they were facing. At 1 pm on 5 November – or according to some Hungarian sources on the 7th or the 9th – units of Obaturov's division mounted another assault on the centre of resistance around the Corvin Cinema, after a bombardment by 170 guns and mortars. The block was surrounded by tanks, which succeeded in silencing all weapons which were threatening them. The Kilián Barracks were also soon occupied.

On the other side of Üllői Road, in the 9th district, some squads of the Tűzoltó Street and Ferenc Square groups joined up to fight the Soviet forces on 4 November. In the evening, they sealed the area bounded by Üllői Road, Ferenc Boulevard, Mester Street and Thaly Kálmán Street with barricades and vehicles. A 20-25 strong subunit of the Tűzoltó Street group engaged Soviet troops in the building on the



MEMBERS OF THE BOSNYÁK SQUAD IN PRÁTER STREET



corner of Nagyváradi Square, but by 6 November that whole group had become completely cut off from the other rebel groups. At about midday on 8 November, the National Guards in this area completely abandoned their resistance.

In the 7th district, the Baross Square group fought Soviet forces in the square and its surroundings. Later, smaller groups fought Soviet troops around Keleti Station. After the cessation of hostilities, they produced and distributed leaflets until 16 November.

MEMBERS OF THE CORVINIST GROUP OF VAJDAHUNYAD STREET.
THE NUMBERING WAS LATER USED FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES
DURING THE REPRISALS



Units of the Hungarian Defence Forces put up organised resistance at only one point in Budapest, Jutadomb (Juta Hill). Units of the 51st Air Defence Battalion and an in-place anti-aircraft battery took up firing positions there. At 10 am on 4 November, a Soviet column of two tanks, two armoured personnel carriers, three trucks and a Hudson car arrived in front of the artillery positions on Soroksári Road. The guns opened fire. Two tanks and the car were knocked out. More than ten Soviet soldiers and Hungarian state security officers in the trucks were wounded and 13 lost their lives. The others escaped. In the afternoon, some of the guns on Jutadomb



THE DESTROYED FACADE OF THE KILIÁN BARRACKS
AND THE MUSEUM OF APPLIED ARTS AFTER THE FIGHTING



opened fire on Soviet troops on Határ Road, knocking out one motorcycle and sidecar. The fuel tank of one Soviet tank was also hit, but the burning vehicle managed to escape.

In Soroksár (20th district), National Guards under László Oltványi – the district commander of the National Guard units – obtained two anti-aircraft cannons and a Soviet multiple rocket launcher, with which they opened fire on a Soviet military vehicle on 5 November. The soldiers on the vehicle returned fire. Two Soviet soldiers were killed, six were wounded and three taken prisoner in the attack. They also



SOVIET TRUCK KNOCKED OUT
IN THE BATTLE OF JUTA HILL



fired on a Soviet tank on 6 November. Afterwards, they did not take up hostilities with the overwhelming Soviet force, and dispersed on 10-11 November.

In Csepel (the 21st district), the National Guard unit swelled to 500-550 after 4 November. They got hold of several medium anti-aircraft guns and one anti-aircraft machine gun from the local anti-aircraft artillery regiment, in positions which allowed them to fire on Soviet troops moving in the Csepel area. One of the guns opened fire and destroyed an armoured vehicle moving along Kossuth Lajos Street in the afternoon of 4 November. The same gun shortly afterwards damaged another armoured vehicle. Later, they opened fire on another vehicle coming from Tököl. The National Guards destroyed the damaged armoured personnel carrier with petrol bombs. The fleeing Soviet soldiers were killed in the firefight. Another gun also knocked out an armoured vehicle, which was also later set on fire. On 7 November, an Il-28 aircraft was shot down by artillery and an ammunition truck was destroyed in the Királyerdő area by a 30-35 strong group on 5 or 6 November. To obstruct or slow down the movement of Soviet troops, the road was blown up in front of Gubacsi Bridge, and blocked with wagons at another point. The multiple rocket launcher taken back from the 20th District was used to attack Tököl Airfield. Following Soviet attacks between 7 and 9 November, the National Guards abandoned resistance on 10 November.

In Pestszentlőrinc (the 18th district), several attacks were launched against Soviet forces after 4 November. National Guardsmen and soldiers, with the help – and later under the command – of an officer from the local anti-aircraft artillery unit, set up two anti-aircraft guns in firing position so as to obstruct the entry of Soviet forces. They opened fire with these on an aircraft and fired several rounds at ground targets. The guns fired at airborne targets on 6 November and at Soviet tanks on the 7th. Later, gun crews at another point knocked out a Soviet truck. The fleeing soldiers from



BUDAPEST, 10 NOVEMBER. THE CHURCH OF ETERNAL WORSHIP AND ITS SURROUNDINGS IN RUINS ON ÜLLŐI ROAD



the truck were captured. It is not known what happened to these Soviet soldiers. The guns later opened fire on Soviet tanks coming from Budapest. These returned fire, causing severe losses among the attackers. National Guardsmen in the district attacked other Soviet tanks on 8 November, knocking out one, and killed a Soviet soldier at one point.



THE CONSEQUENCES
OF THE TERRIBLE FIGHTS



On 4 November, the military officer in command of the National Guard in Kispest (the 19th district) handed out weapons to volunteers, who then opened fire on Soviet forces moving in front of the police station. Later, after being fired on and then attacked by Soviet troops, the National Guards in the building were forced to evacuate, but on 6 November a 100-150-strong group continued fighting Soviet troops. Four smaller National Guard groups engaged the Soviet units at several points in the district, but faced with overwhelming force on the 8th and 9th, they abandoned resistance.

Anti-aircraft artillery units stationed in Kőbánya (10th district), assisted by National Guards, opened fire on attacking Soviet forces following 4 November, and in fighting that continued until 8 November, they destroyed four or five tanks, three armoured personnel carriers and one radio car. About 30 Soviet troops lost their lives in these clashes in the district. The group that formed up in the district police station halted an ammunition truck and disarmed Soviet soldiers during the hostilities following 4 November. They were dispersed by Soviet forces on 6 November. Another group of National Guards put two Soviet armoured personnel carriers out of action in the period following 4 November. Several Soviet soldiers were killed and others taken prisoner at that point; the captured soldiers were later released. The unit abandoned resistance on 11 November.

In Angyalföld (13th district), the acting police captain and a demobilised army officer, László Homola, reacted to the news of the Soviet attack by arming members of the public who came forward. The same day, the district National Guard led by Homola moved into the József Attila Community Centre. The commanders organised armed groups at several points throughout the district, the most active being at the crossroads of Rákospatak Road and Váci Road, the Mauthner Sándor Street School and the Box Factory at the corner of Mauthner Sándor Road and Balzsam Street. These groups had a total strength of 135-160, and there were up to 240-



260 people under arms in the district during this period. The group stationed beside the Rákospatak (Rákos stream) was commanded by Ferenc Csizmadia. On 5 November, it mounted an attack against a Soviet unit passing along Váci Road. Four Soviet soldiers were killed in the exchange of fire.

On 5 November and subsequent days, the Thököly Road fighters, reinforced by János Futó's group, inflicted serious losses on the Soviets. The rebels fought in the Lehel Road and Fóti Road areas, but were dispersed by Soviet forces on 8 November. Many sub-groups moved to Újpest and joined the National Guard units fighting there. On 4 November, the Chairman of the National Committee called on the residents of Újpest (4th District) to repulse the Soviet attack. The district commanders stationed themselves in the Könyves Kálmán Secondary School and, together with the largest group in the building, set about organising defence of the district and directing the fight against Soviet forces.

At the firing position set up at the barrier beside the Box Factory on 4 November, there were 80-100 National Guardsmen on duty with one armoured vehicle, two machine guns and other infantry weapons. Sándor S. Nagy commanded the group until 6 November when he became commander of the district, and was replaced by Ferenc Csizmadia, whose group of fighters in Rákospalota had made a fighting retreat from the Soviets. In the fighting between 4 and 8 November, the Soviet forces dispersed the National Guardsmen at the barrier, at Újpest Cemetery, at the REMIZ (garage) on Váci Road, at the Water Tower and at other points in the district. The hostilities, which involved heavy losses on both sides, effectively came to an end upon the capture of Könyves Kálmán Secondary School on 8 November. The National Guard units based in Dózsa Secondary School in the 15th district blew up fuel tankers after 4 November.



FIGHTING IN THE COUNTRY

Outside Budapest, the armies of Generals Babadjanyan and Mamsurov surrounded the principal bases and barracks of the Hungarian People's Army. First, and almost simultaneously, they attacked and captured the airports and the barracks, and then took control of the roads to Budapest and the Austrian border.

Seeing the Soviet army attacking in such overwhelming strength, most of the Hungarian People's Army units did not even attempt resistance. Having surrounded the provincial barracks on 3 November, the Soviet forces opened fire without warning, and disarmed and broke up the units, most of which surrendered without a fight.

The ruthlessness of the Soviet forces is illustrated by an incident at the barracks of the 19th Záhony in-place Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion, where surrounding Soviet tanks opened fire on the unarmed soldiers assembling inside, resulting in the death of 5 soldiers and the wounding of 8. The 60 soldiers taken prisoner by the Soviet troops were taken over the border, but allowed to return on 6 November. There were some clashes between Hungarian military units and Soviet forces, notably those involving the garrisons of Szolnok, Dunaföldvár and Székesfehérvár.

An encounter on a larger scale involved the anti-aircraft artillery regiment at Dunapentele. After a ceasefire was refused by the National Committee, the general attack started at 2:30 pm on 7 November. After a 25-minute artillery attack, eight MiG-17 aircraft attacked the positions of the anti-aircraft artillery batteries. The town was surrounded by tanks and fired on by heavy mortars and 122 mm gun-howitzers. The defence of Dunapentele collapsed at 6:30 am. There were at least 8 deaths and 35 other casualties on the Hungarian side. 41 medium and light anti-aircraft artillery pieces were put out of action.



The rebels in the Mecsek Hills, the “Mecsek Invisibles”, kept up resistance longer than any other group. They attacked police and security forces as well as Soviet troops.

Soviet sources claim that all organised resistance by the Hungarian rebels was put down by the end of November, by which time the army had also been disarmed. After this, it was Soviet forces which took over military administration – patrols and guards under orders from garrison commanders, etc. The Soviet state security bodies – the KGB – continued the arrests of rebels and resistance fighters and searched for weapons among the public. Deportation of those arrested started immediately.

The sad consequences of the “provision of assistance” by Soviet forces, in fact a full scale attack on Hungary, are illustrated by the following figures: the fighting ended with Budapest, eleven years after the war, again in ruins, some 20,000 wounded, and more than two and a half thousand – 279 of them soldiers – dead. More than 200,000 Hungarians fled abroad. According to the casualty list of the Soviet Ministry of Defence, some 700 soldiers died, 1986 were wounded, and 51 disappeared. In the reprisals, more than 20,000 were sentenced to imprisonment, and 229 were condemned to death and executed. The principal demand of the Revolution and War of Independence, the withdrawal of Soviet military forces, was eventually fulfilled in 1991.

*Excerpt from Miklós Horváth–Éva Tulipán: *In Memoriam 1956* (Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 2006)

ARTILLERY BATTERY MANNED BY STUDENT INSURGENTS PREPARING TO ATTACK THE SOVIET TROOPS IN SOPRON (IN NOVEMBER 1956) ►





“ON THE WAVELENGTH OF FREEDOM”*

The notes taken by V. N. Malin, head of the General Department of the Central Committee of the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, constitute the sole source on the debates in the Presidium on the Hungarian question in October-November 1956. The Russian historian Vyacheslav Sereda studied and edited these notes. In 2005, Sereda told a BBC reporter what had emerged from the Malin notes on the decisions made about the Hungarian Revolution. “The notes show that until 31 October, many ideas or scenarios had emerged, but they did not dare make a decision. They waited for events to unfold, to see how the world reacted to the Revolution, and how the fraternal Communist parties reacted. The notes also show that there was a scenario discussed and accepted whereby the Hungarian uprising need not be put down, but an agreement must be reached with the Imre Nagy government. They had almost decided that the Imre Nagy government should remain in power in Hungary when several international factors combined to cause a sudden change. That they decided differently was probably first of all due to the events in Suez on the night of 30-31 October, which they had to take account of. When the Soviets ascertained that America was not supporting Britain, France and Israel in the Suez war, they got bolder and realised that they could use such methods too. Secondly, I think the Chinese factor was very important, because it emerges from the notes that the Chinese were always playing to weaken the authority of the Soviet Union within the international Communist movement. Mao Zedong and company held this position until they ultimately became convinced that the Communist dictatorship would probably fall in Hungary, which would then break out of the Socialist bloc. That was when they changed their positions and said that the Hungarian Revolution had to be suppressed. Of course they



did not call it a revolution. Molotov and Kaganovich held this position from the beginning. Khrushchev constantly vacillated, because if he went for suppression, the spirit of the 20th Congress would be paralysed for a long time. This was a very important factor, but it was still not finally decided, and the resolution only mentioned preparations, because a whole lot of things had to be done before the intervention. First of all there were technical and military problems, and then there were the leaders of the other socialist countries. They had to be talked to, most of all Tito. But the other Communist leaders were also very worried, like Togliatti. On the 30th, he sent a telegram to the Soviets that what was happening in Hungary was in their view a counter-revolutionary insurrection. So until the big step they took on the 31st, the Soviet leaders were still considering some compromise options for solving the Hungarian question. The final decision came after they reached an agreement with Tito. The rest went more easily, except for Gomulka's government. Khrushchev, Malenkov and Molotov met with the Polish leaders on 1 November. The Poles did not state a position either pro or contra. They were not very enthusiastic about the Soviets occupying Hungary.”

The next day, on 5 November, László Veress made the following comments on the BBC Hungarian service about the bloody suppression of the Hungarian Revolution: “The Moscow military communiqué stating that they had crushed the Hungarian uprising was wrong. There were no military obstacles to taking control of the country. About twenty Soviet divisions rumbled into little Hungary. The radio read out the decrees of the Soviet military command, and the shadow of the dictatorship by an invading power fell over the country. Every war has a political aim, and the Soviet attack against the Hungarian people was doomed to political failure. The Hungarian freedom struggle was not finished. It is easy to make a bloodbath and chaos. Phosphorous incendiary grenades do not give rise to productive life, and there is no nation, least of all the Hungarian, which recognises as its government sworn enemies who had asked the Soviet military



leadership to rain murderous fire on the capital city and slaughter the young and old of the country indiscriminately.

That is what was done by a small group of Communist puppets huddled in the Szolnok headquarters of the Soviet military. They admitted this in the fourteenth point of the so-called “government programme”. No government had ever come out with such a programme: ‘The Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, in the interests of our people, the working class and the country, has asked the commanders of the Soviet army to help in crushing the dark forces of reaction and restoring order and peace in the country.’ That was the only point of János Kádár’s National Programme that was already a reality. Soviet troops were ravaging Budapest, and as was stated at the extraordinary General Assembly of the United Nations at midnight that night, they were shooting indiscriminately at everything and everybody as they ran amok in Hungary. And as Moscow could not get enough of saying, all this was happening at the express request of the so-called government of Hungary itself, the puppet government of János Kádár.

Moscow did not dare to admit to the Russian people that they had sent in the Soviet divisions against the unarmed Hungarian people. Moscow Radio had reported the night before that the whole thing was child’s play, only a handful of rebels had to be put out of action. So in order to deal with a handful of rebels, Hungary had to be flooded with several thousand tanks, Budapest had to be fired on with artillery and bombed from the air, huge hordes of tanks had to be let loose on the Hungarian capital, and in complete disregard of the Geneva Convention, and the written and unwritten rules of warfare and humanity, women, children and the elderly had to be slaughtered indiscriminately. It is notable that the Geneva-based Red Cross broadcast a warning to Hungary in Russian.



Nonetheless, they did not have such an easy time of it, and the people resisted the appalling Soviet assault with their bare hands. Not even the Soviet supreme command knew how to get out of the dreadful, senseless bloodbath which brought shame on the Russian armed forces. The Soviet command in Hungary that day appealed to the Hungarian army by radio to stand on the Soviet side against the Hungarian people. It was therefore obvious that there was still a Hungarian army, some remnants were still struggling. The scattered struggle was continuing. The British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, told a hushed House of Commons that fighting had not stopped in Hungary. The Soviet command in its radio proclamation of that day tried to calm down the seething rage in Hungary with the promise that the Soviet army did not intend to invade Hungary. And shrugging his shoulders at the Hungarian



SOVIET TANKS
CRUSHING THE REVOLUTION



people in their pools of blood, the Soviet commander said they should not blame the Soviet army, which only came at the request of János Kádár's government. And to cap it all, he expressed his hope that the Hungarian people would accept the assistance of the Soviet military with the same understanding as in 1945 when it liberated them from fascist subservience.

In 1956, it was Soviet subservience Hungary was trying to liberate itself from. It had a lawful government, with which on the eve of the attack the Soviet command had started talks on withdrawing its troops. Now we know the exact time when Moscow's patience ran out and finally decided to rampage through Hungary. The Kádár group revealed that they had



LONDON, 12 NOVEMBER. STUDENTS PROTESTING IN HYDE PARK AGAINST THE SUPPRESSION OF THE REVOLUTION



broken off from the Imre Nagy government on 1 November. They did not make it public then. It was only on Saturday 3 November that the country was told, with great rejoicing, that Apró, Marosán, Münnich, Imre Horváth and company, i.e. the whole Moscow clique remaining from the days of Rákosi had been officially kicked out of the government. Now they claimed they had left of their own accord several days before. Why the hurry? Perhaps they knew the Russians too well, and knew that the purpose of the Soviet inrush could only be preparation for trampling down the country, and they wanted to join in. But it could not have been a coincidence that their leaving directly followed Imre Nagy's announcement of free elections in Hungary and a return to the multi-party system. At that moment, the Kádár group were hurrying to Szolnok to hide under the protective wing of the Soviet command. And it seems that Moscow itself, if it had still been hesitating to crush the Hungarian struggle for freedom, made the decision to strike upon hearing of the proposal for free elections. It had been willing to tolerate the Hungarian Revolution as long as the Communist Party retained sole power and the country, under the control of the Communist Party apparatus, was guaranteed to stay on the Soviet side. But as soon as the will of the Hungarian people persuaded Imre Nagy and his government to promise free elections, lift the Communist monopoly on power and declare Hungarian neutrality, Moscow saw a threat to its control in the whole of Eastern Europe, not just in Hungary, and even feared the effect of the Hungarian Revolution on the various peoples of the Soviet state itself. If Hungary was vociferously demanding political freedom after ten years of Communist rule, one day every country of Eastern Europe might follow its example, indeed every people of the Russian empire, even after thirty-eight years. This was the great lesson of the Hungarian Revolution for Moscow.

*Excerpt from Péter Pallai – Mátyás Sárközi:

A szabadság hullámhosszán

(On the Wavelength of Freedom. Helikon Kiadó, Budapest, 2006)



1956 IN THE HISTORY OF THE 20TH CENTURY*

HUNGARY AND THE WORLD

1956 was a world event. What happened in October 1956 became known nearly everywhere in the world almost as soon as it happened. It was 1956 which, to a considerable extent, formed the image of Hungary in the 20th century, and in many respects it still defines worldwide perceptions of the Hungarians. If we were to examine associations of the word “Hungarian” at different points throughout the world, 1956 would feature very prominently among them. It is almost certainly the best-known event of Hungary’s history. The reasons are not hard to see.

It is the only Hungary-related, indeed Hungary-centred, event of international significance (in world history terms) that features in personal or partly-personal memories. 1956 took place in the modern media era, the age of worldwide radio broadcasting (but just before television was to spread across the world). For today’s politicians and the great figures of culture and literature, 1956 is, for current generational reasons, their early defining experience. And it is a positive experience.

The latter is of no small significance. Before the Revolution, the image of Hungary and the Hungarians was not too flattering, especially in the West. Unfavourable impressions of Hungarians emerged at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the interwar period did little to improve them, and the Second World War provided more of its own. Viewed from outside, the Hungarians were Hitler’s allies in the war, and even if they were subsequently invaded by the Soviets, they enthusiastically joined in the building of the communist system, confiscating Western property, arresting politicians, priests and peaceful businessmen and keeping



SÁNDOR GYÖRFI:
THE END OF THE GAME



them in custody (the Standard and Maort trials). Of course the truth was different, but subtleties are never apparent from outside, and even the many honourable efforts by Hungarian democratic émigrés did little to change impressions.

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution changed all this. Budapest gave the first powerful, visible and audible signal that after the final defeat of one totalitarian system, the oppressed people were now challenging the other. In this way, Hungary was part of the global process which tried to respond to the 20th century crisis, and was also trying to preserve the individual and collective, political and economic freedom of the previous century, which was denied by the totalitarian systems. 1956 bore none of the suspicion of nationalist threats to regional peace (often unjust and one-sided, and nearly always exaggerated) which had beset Hungary in previous decades. In addition, despite the Revolution's fall, its greater and smaller triumphs (reformed, more human, more tolerable socialism) stood out and appeared to be consequences of the Revolution, and both the visible and hidden adverse consequences of defeat were soon forgotten, or remained hidden. The reprisals evoked widespread international outrage, but this did not last long and was little mentioned after the 1963 amnesty. Few dealt with the mental effects of the 1956 defeat.

In the eyes of the international public, it was towards the end of the century, in 1989–1991, when Soviet socialism and the Soviet empire were disappearing, that 1956 took its final place in the great story. The Hungarian Revolution was the herald of the Central-Eastern European changes of 1989-91, an early and heroic experiment whose true purpose and meaning were to reveal themselves three and a half decades later. 1956, in its own way, “set Hungary apart” in the West, lifting the country out of the homogeneous-looking mass of



“Eastern Europe”. From that time, it was the memory of how the Hungarian people had risen up for their freedom – even after that memory ceased to be fresh – that defined the way the country was “treated”. In democratic countries which had accepted “the realities” so easily, this memory played on the political – and in many cases personal – conscience. Paradoxically, it was the suppressor of the Revolution, the Kádár regime, which gained most from this, in the form of unmerited international prestige, although some benefit did also reach the intended target, the people of Hungary.

Hungary itself also looked on the world differently than it had before 1956 – more realistically, in two senses. 1956 marked the end of a hope, of the expectation of a miracle, the idea that the democratic West would liberate Hungary, or at least give real assistance (especially if we do something for it, something really big). The disillusionment stemming from failure turned to persistent public gloom. At the same time, 1956 opened Hungary up. Two hundred thousand people from all sections of society simultaneously found places in another world, from where they regularly reported back. All this happened at a time when most of the population of Hungary had been deprived of impressions of the outside world for several decades, and what they had got was distorted and fragmentary. After 1956, the 20th century’s greatest wave of emigration, the totalitarian “caisson” system could not be maintained. A new dimension opened up: the experiences of masses of people – relations, friends, acquaintances – of everyday life in the “other” world, first in indirect communications, and from the mid-1960s onwards increasingly through personal encounters, and eventually via direct experience. Thanks to the helpfulness prompted by the international crisis of conscience, and the character of the refugees, this experience was usually transmitted as a success story. From that time on, the socialist system could not convincingly present itself as surpassing its opposite number in so many respects.[...]



In its symbolism, heroism, rhetoric, extremism, idealism and purity, 1956 was perhaps the last 19th century revolution. Its incredibly short duration and bloody suppression saved the Revolution and its participants from disintegration. 1956 now appears to us as a stage populated by romantic-heroic figures (the People, Good, Evil, the Workers, the Street, the Street Children, the Prime Minister, the Cardinal), figures which had not appeared elsewhere for a long time and would not, in quite these roles, do so ever again. But all this happened in the 20th century, with 20th century protagonists, some of whom carried on their lives after the Revolution; for those who did not, their 20th century careers had led up to the Revolution. 1956 took place well before the total media era of the 21st century, and so its account is basically written – literary, like that of 1848. 1968 lives in motion pictures, and the end-of-the-century events came to us by direct satellite broadcast. Nonetheless, it is no accident that 1956 did not, and probably never will, have a Victor Hugo or a Mór Jókai to write its story. The picture is only 19th century when seen from afar, on its own; closer up, it is “only” of the last century, just like its environment and its subsidiary figures. Time and argument are causing its image to fade and fragment, and a new century is contributing its own doubts. Only when we dispense with 19th century patterns will the historical legacy of the 20th century, incorporating the legacy of 1956, find its real form. What that is like depends on us.

*Excerpt from M. János Rainer’s essay *1956 a 20. század történelmében* (“1956 in the history of the 20th century”), from the book *Tizenhárom nap, amely...* (“Thirteen Days that...”. MoD Military History Institute and Museum, Budapest, 2003).

*John Sadovy, photographer for the American magazine Life,
who recorded the violence and fear in Budapest in 1956:*

Then my nerves went.
Tears started to come down my cheeks.
I had spent three years in the war,
but nothing I saw then could compare
with the horror of this.



MEMORIAL TO PÉTER MANSFELD, EXECUTED AT THE AGE OF 18,
AN EMBLEMATIC FIGURE OF THE REVOLUTION. MIKLÓS MELOCCO:
SHOOTING STAR (PHOTO: VERONIKA DÉVÉNYI)

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