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THE FIGHTING CONDUCTED BY THE 10TH KAPOSVÁR HONVÉD
INFANTRY DIVISION IN DEFENDING HUNGARY (1943 – 1945)

Doctoral Thesis

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Research background and Problem Identification

In 2008 I started to study the history of Somogy county military units, when I came across to the front diary written by my grandfather, Géza Lukács, a former first lieutenant near the Don River in 1942-43. As he fought there as platoon commander of the 6th infantry division in the above-mentioned period, firstly, I tried to cover the events and topics mentioned in the diary, and then I carried out further research on the names. In 2010, we published our first short work together with Géza Kovács, and then in January 2012 we launched our 25 minute-long documentary in Árpád Egyed Cultural Centre, Kaposvár, financed by HM Zrínyi Média Kft, which was later followed by an exhibition. In 2015, our research work came to fruition: at the end of the year, Zrínyi Publishing House published our book *The Somogy Division near the Don River*. At that particular time I had already been carrying out my research on the involvement of Somogy county's troops in a 'formalised' framework, as in 2014 I had been admitted to the doctoral school of history of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Pázmány Péter University.

During WWII the troops from Baranya, Somogy and Tolna County were mobilized several times, playing their part in the war efforts of the country. They took part in the occupation of Northern Transylvania, in the campaign of Voivodina, and in 1941 some of the units were deployed to the Eastern Front with occupational assignments. Various troops from Pécs, Szekszárd, Tolna, Kaposvár and Nagyatád took part in the unequal fighting near the Don river, and in 1943-44 fought under the command of the Hungarian Occupation Forces in what is today Belorussia and the Ukraine. In my thesis I intend to present the last phase of the battles fought by the 10th Kaposvár Infantry Division between September 1943 and February 1945 along the Drava River, in the Carpathians, in the Tisza Danube region, as well as near Pest until it had completely disintegrated, and its remaining troops joined the newly forming first Hungarian unit against the Germans.

As this topic has never been given any detailed treatment, after thorough examination of the sources and analysing the possibilities I decided to choose the history of the 10th royal infantry division as the topic of my dissertation.

Historiographical overview

At the beginning of my research my main concern was that I would be facing a serious lack of source documents, as far as the core material of my thesis is concerned. In the War

History Archives, the majority of documents referring to the 10th infantry division from August to November 1944 are almost completely missing, and unfortunately, only a few documents are to be found in the Somogy County Archives. I did not have any more success with contemporary newspapers (Új Somogy, Somogyi Újság), as no war-related news was published in them, apart from the personal messages sent to and from the frontline.

Fortunately, the relevant literature helped me to overcome certain difficulties yet, because of the previously mentioned problem nobody else was able to explore on the period between August and mid-November 1944. (However, the period starting with the Siege of Budapest was an entirely different matter.) In addition, the wider frame of my research was set by Péter Szabó's paper which gives a comprehensive view of the role played by troops from Somogy/Kaposvár and Southern Transdanubia in WWII. From this perspective, the book co-authored by Péter Szabó and Norbert Számvéber, presenting the battlefield events on the Eastern Front and Hungary proved to be most helpful, just as much as Krisztián Ungváry's books on the Royal Hungarian Army and the Siege of Budapest which have passed through several editions. Norbert Számvéber's book focusing on the aspects of tank warfare in the Siege of Budapest was of equal importance, as its second edition contains previously unknown German and Russian documents which complemented the data regarding the history of the infantry division. Another work of crucial importance was *Fortress near the Danube*, a collection of documents edited by Norbert Számvéber, which besides Hungarian sources contains German, Romanian and Soviet source documents as well. Some of the foreign-language books of the historiographic literature translated into Hungarian were written before 1990. Among these, the one I found most useful was A. A. Grechko's book on the fighting by the 4th Ukrainian Front. Among the researchers active today I would like to mention the Bulgarian Kamen Nevenkin's excellent book on the initial stage of the Siege of Budapest, based on Soviet archival documents.

In the second part of my dissertation, the diary of the 10th Hungarian royal infantry division from the War History Archives proved to be of great help. The diary and its annexes were donated to the War History Archives by lieutenant colonel Endre Száz's widow – as it has been established thanks to Colonel Attila Bonhardt.¹ I also made use of the 10th infantry division orderly book, which is also contained in the War History Archives.

¹ As Chief of Staff Captain Győző Benyovszky later recalled, it was him who had had the division diary secretly buried in a backyard at Orly köz 5, near Gellért Hotel, during the siege of Budapest, on 8 February 1945.

With regard to the fighting in the Danube-Tisza region and Budapest, I was able to make use of documents by foreign authors, such as the digitalized documents of the German 6th army and those published on the internet by the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (Podolsk). I consider Dieter Hoffman's book on the Magdeburg 13th Panzer Division and its predecessors as relevant literature, as well as Romanian army corps general Nicolae Sova's memoirs from 1963. Although the terminology of the latter can be considered obsolete, yet it contains significant details about the fighting conducted by the Romanian troops near Budapest. Additionally, although to a very limited extent, at times I relied on the English version of original Russian documents from the internet.

In the Hungarian-language literature, the three-volume standard reference book by Lieutenant-General Lajos Veress de Dálnok stands out. The documents partially or entirely covering the period of summer 1944 February 1945 of the 10th infantry division are also significant. Among the documents contained in the War History Archives the three memoirs by Lieutenant József Bíró, author of the 10th infantry division war diary stand out. Important datum are provided in the volume *With God in the Line of Fire* edited by István Selmeczi, containing the diary of Gábor Csánki the protestant army chaplain of the 8th Honvéd Infantry Regiment, the memoirs of 6th Kaposvár Honvéd Infantry Regiment protestant army chaplain Péteri Ferenc, as well as the 6/III Battalion First Lieutenant István Szabó's memoirs.

The sources and documents which have been unavailable for researchers and the general public alike yet which I was fortunate enough to have access to, proved to be extremely helpful. Among these the most remarkable proved to be Lieutenant General István Kudriczy's memoirs discovered in the US, and which is largely unpublished. Equally important is complete squadron documentation, a document in the possession to First Lieutenant Ödön Vadász squadron commander, which was provided by his family in Kaposvár. The latter is of enormous significance as source document because, as I previously mentioned, the War History Archives only contain the documents of the 10th infantry division up to August 1944, whereas First Lieutenant Vadász's squadron diary from 26 July 1944 to 22 December 1944 and its annexes, as well as division, army corps and army command documents, name indexes, casualty lists and maps annexed to it proved to be extremely valuable in my research. Somehow, in a miraculous way this document survived intact in its entirety. I also gained access to a seven-page liaison diary of the IV Platoon, containing entries of 26-29 December 1944.

The manuscript containing several interviews with former subordinates conducted by Narcissza Ludányi and her husband Howard Layton in Somogy county and Budapest in 1998

is of equally important significance, the copy of which I had access to, courtesy of András Ludányi.

Although I began my research on this topic in 2008, in its first stage I mostly collected documents relating to the division's role near the Don River. Unfortunately, while carrying out my research I was able to talk to a few veterans only, and with those whom I managed to conduct an interview only one was a member of the 10th infantry division.

I believe it is worth mentioning that after the completion of my thesis (24. 10. 2019.) two relevant books have been published, one by Kamen Nevenkin (Fortress Budapest 1-2) and by Krisztián Ungváry (Heroes? – The German Military Elite at the Siege of Budapest) which should have been incorporated into my thesis. Yet, haven been limited by the due date of the theses, I was forced not to include any possible new information on the topic.

Objective, methodology and layout of the dissertation

At the beginning of my doctoral research, I established as my main objective to reconstruct the events related to the Kaposvár 10th infantry regiment in a chronological order, based on the available source documents and literature. Whenever possible, I tried to confront the available documents on the events, and whenever possible I made use of the eyewitness accounts, sometimes even giving them slightly more space than expected.

After the Introduction, in Chapter 2 I placed the background of the formation of the division into a wider historic context, with an additional overview of the events on the Eastern Front and Hungary. Since only one month after its formation the division was mobilized, I felt it was important to cover a less well-known chapter of the war, so I elaborated on the history of border skirmishes and smaller-scale battles between Hungary and Croatia. At the same time, I tried to provide an outlook on the events on the Balkans in 1943-44.

In Chapter 3 I focused on the formation of the 1st Army, the events related to its deployment and combat activities near the Carpathians, the Romanian breakout and its consequences, as well as the fighting of the division from mid-August 1944 until its withdrawal in October. Having been compelled to sum up an extremely broad topic, I considered it necessary to present the previous military campaigns of the 1st Army, the resulting and concurrent political and military changes, as this chapter presents the events from the German occupation up to the preparation of the breakout attempt. One could say that these two events can be considered the cornerstones leading to the country's defeat in WWII.

In Chapter 4, I am trying to analyse the main events leading up to this ill-prepared action, as well as the events occurring simultaneously within the division. In my view, the verbatim reproduction of the memoirs by division commander major general Kudriczy István, published in this chapter, has a huge documentary value, as it intends to faithfully recreate his conversations with First Army commander General Béla Miklós de Dálnok, VI Corps commander Lieutenant General Ferenc Farkas de kisbarnaki, and First Army Chief of Staff colonel Kálmán Kéri. In this chapter I took the liberty to present the documents more extensively which might be considered as a methodological flaw.

Chapter 5 begins with the period after the takeover of the Arrow Cross Party, when the division was subordinated to the ill-equipped and understaffed 3rd Army. It is at this point, during the fighting in the Danube–Tisza region, when the disintegration of the division begins, as the majority of the soldiers from Tolna, Somogy and Baranya were fighting very close to their homes. The relentless Soviet advance, the Soviet offensive against Budapest and the ever-weakening German presence all foreshadowed the tragic fate of the division, the latter being preceded by a short interlude.

In Chapter 6 I am dealing with the brief period of defensive fighting along the Danube while the troops had the chance to take a short rest. During this period, the 10th division is subordinated to the 2nd Army only existing on paper, the latter being bypassed by the Germans who scatter the division more and more which finally is subordinated to the German army.

That is the reason why in Chapter 7, dealing with the fighting near the eastern part and within Budapest, I felt it necessary to focus on the history of the German 13th Panzer Division, as in the last months of its existence the Kaposvár infantry division was involved in the fighting from 17 November until the end of the siege of Budapest as subordinated to the German division. Then, in February 1945, the remaining troops that had defected to the Soviets took up the name Buda Voluntary Regiment.

Research Results

As I have previously mentioned with respect to historiography, the the archival documents on the 10th infantry division are extremely incomplete. That is why I consider the unpublished source documents I have managed to collect and elaborate on since the beginning of my research of a great importance. As the sources reveal previously unknown details on the 10th infantry Division subordinated to the 1st then the 3rd Army, the fact that we managed to

clarify establish a chronological order of the events relating to the division in the period between August and November 1944.

The examination and presentation of a relatively unknown period of Hungarian military history – the skirmishes on the Hungarian-Croatian border in fall and winter 1943 - may also be viewed as an important result.

The fact that by evaluating the division diary and by incorporating both unpublished and known sources into my thesis, I managed to improve our previous knowledge on the events during and after the 102-day long battle of Budapest, which may also be regarded as a significant achievement.

Although any researcher is treading on thin ice if he uses diaries or memoirs as a source document – in our case reserve lieutenant József Bíró's memoirs from 1990 – yet after concluding my research it is safe to declare that the contents of his memoirs - compared to data from the latest sources - stood the test of source-criticism. I consider this statement to be relevant also because after the failed breakout attempt of 15 October, the bad relationship with the pro-German comrades-in-arms and Arrow-Cross party as presented in his diary has been confirmed by several officers of the Kaposvár infantry division

In conclusion, we may say that by completing the basic research on a relatively little known aspect of the Hungarian military history of WW2 and by summing up the results in the present thesis we managed to present a more detailed and nuanced picture of the topic. By conducting archival researches in the future and analysing the literature published after the closing of this thesis, it is my goal to expand the dissertation and to make it available for a broader access.

Publications

Book:

1. Bence Ákos Lukács – Péter Szabó: The Somogy Rosseb Division on the Don River, Zrínyi Publishing House, Budapest, 2015

Articles, papers:

1. Bence Ákos Lukács: *Charge Ahead, Rosseb, Charge Ahead!* The Royal Hungarian “Nagy Lajos király”² 6th Infantry Regiment’s military operations within the 1 Hungarian Army (18 August 1944 – 9 October 1944), in: *Lefe Behind the Frontline – Studies in honour of Péter Szabó* (eds. Mária Katalin Kincses – Péter Illésfalvi), Budapest, War History Museum, pp. 284 - 310
2. Bence Ákos Lukács: *Charles’ IV visits to Székelyföld* (2nd extended and revised edition) – in, *Székelyföld and the Great War, Selected papers on the occasion of WWI Centenary* (ed. Zsolt Orbán), Csíkszereda, Csíkszereda Kiadóhivatal, 2018, pp. 99 - 120
3. Bence Ákos Lukács: *Charles’ IV visits to Székelyföld (1916-1918)* (2016), in, *Székelyföld folyóirat, (20 évf.) / 8.sz.*
4. Péter Szabó - Bence Ákos Lukács: *Escaping from Hell - How the Artillerists from Kaposvár Managed to Break Through the Siege of Ostrogozhsk on 20 January 1943* – In: *Katonájság* 2014/1. szám
5. Bence Ákos Lukács: *Variations on the Hungarian Identity in Vojvodina, As Illustrated by the example of Tóthfalu in Bačka*, In *Aracs: a délvidéki magyarság közéleti folyóirata*, 2010 (10. évf.)/ 4. sz.
6. Géza Kovács – Bence Ákos Lukács: *A First Lieutenant from Somogy on the Eastern Front*, In: *Magyar Hírlap*, 2010. 01.13. sz.
7. Bence Ákos Lukács: *Black March – the Marosvásárhely Pogrom in 1990* – In: *Dunapart folyóirat*, 2009/3. sz.

² I. Lajos „the great”, hungarian king between 1342-1382.