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**Miserable Hungarian Occupiers and Their Miserable Subjects: Review Article of Ungváry, Krisztián. *A magyar megszálló csapatok a Szovjetunióban, 1941-1944. Esemény - elbeszélés - utóélet* [The Hungarian Occupation Troops in the Soviet Union, 1941-1944. Event - Narrative - Afterlife]. *Osiris*, pp. 467. Maps, Photographs.**

István Deák

**Abstract:** It took some seventy years after World War II for the educated part of the Hungarian public to obtain comprehensive information on the double tragedy of Hungary's participation in the German military campaign against the Soviet Union. Not only was the army's defeat at the Don River in the winter of 1942/43. an unmitigated catastrophe, but as Krisztián Ungváry demonstrates, the Hungarian honvéd forces, performing occupation duty in Ukraine and a part of Belorussia, committed atrocities against the civilian population which nearly equaled those of the German occupiers. Moreover, the ill-equipped Hungarians' main dilemma was a nefarious entanglement in local ethnic and nationalist conflicts, in which the Soviet Partisans played only a limited role.

**Keywords:** *Ukraine, honvéd army, public intellectuals, secret archives, Hungarian occupation, World War II, Miklós Horthy, siege of Budapest, German and Soviet occupation*

**Biography:** István Deák, who is Emeritus Professor at Columbia University in New York City, was born in Hungary and studied history in Budapest, Paris Munich, and at Columbia University, where he obtained his PhD degree in 1964. For numerous years he was the director of Columbia's Institute on East Central Europe. His published books deal with such various topics as Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals; Louis Kossuth and the 1848 revolution in Hungary; the social and political History of the Habsburg officer corps, 1848-1918; Hitler's Europe, and collaboration, resistance and retribution in Europe during World War II. Almost all these books appeared also in other language editions. He is proudest of the forty some essays he contributed regularly for some thirty years to the *New York Review of Books*. id1@columbia.edu

Krisztián Ungváry is one of Hungary's most celebrated, most stimulating, and most controversial historians cum public intellectual; forcibly, a review of his voluminous publication on the Hungarian occupation troops in the Soviet Union must broaden into an examination, however brief, of his overall activities and writings. After all, the book under review sheds light not only on the terrible and terribly complex Hungarian military occupation but also on Hungary



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then and now, and on Ungváry's place in Hungarian society. Characteristically for him, this book, which appeared in 2015, is not his most recent scholarly product; almost simultaneously, several other of his writings appeared on such topics as the political system of the Horthy regime, anti-Semitism, the Holocaust in Hungary, the Communist police and the right-wing movements in Hungary, not to speak of popular histories.<sup>1</sup> They testify both to Ungváry's extraordinary intellectual capabilities and his deep familiarity with his chosen topics. Admittedly, they also reveal another, less happy trait of his: the willingness to repeat the same argument within the same work and from one publication to another.

Krisztián Ungváry was born in 1969, in Budapest, into an intellectual family of German-Hungarian origin. His father, Rudolf, an engineer and publicist, is one of the most dedicated fighters for what seems to be a lost cause, liberal and democratic Hungary. Krisztián studied history in Budapest, and, somewhat surprisingly from someone whose looks and behavior are the very opposite of those of a policeman or a soldier, he became a foremost expert of the workings of the Communist secret police, wars, especially of World War II, and all things military. His home in Budapest resembles a museum of military insignia and of war memorabilia. If we add to all this that he is also a celebrated connoisseur of wines, who owns and manages a successful winery in the famous Tokaj region, it becomes clear that we have to do here with a colorful personality.

Ungváry married more than once; this, his most recent marriage has been blessed with twin sons. He is a devout Catholic and used to be a boy-scout leader. Ungváry has some teaching experience, but perhaps because he is so soft-spoken and quiet, he prefers to do research and writing. For such activities his research position at the 1956-os Intézet [The 1956 Institute-Oral History Archive] in Budapest seemed to be an ideal place, except for the growing hostility of Viktor Orbán's regime to all institutions which were, or perhaps still are, partly supported by George Soros's Open Society Fund. In 2016 the Director of the Hungarian National Library, to which the 1956 Institute was then administratively subordinated, disciplined four members of the Institute, Krisztián Ungváry among them, for having granted an interview to a journalist without first obtaining the Director's permission. It is widely believed that the Director would not have acted against the four historians without pressure by the regime historian, Mária Schmidt, the Institute's politically powerful opponent. Schmidt's goal seems to be to wipe out of public memory the decisive role that disillusioned Communist intellectuals and party leaders, several of them of Jewish origin, played in both the movement for liberal reform and the democratic political revolution of October 1956. Instead, Schmidt and the right-wing, nationalist regime are promoting the memory of some young people, many of them teen-agers, who in 1956 fought the Soviet tanks with Molotov cocktails. The specific issue at this time was the Institute members'

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *Búvópatakok. A jobboldal és az állambiztonság, 1945-1989* ['Subterranean Streams: The Right-Wing and State Security'] Jaffa Kiadó, 2013; *Tettesek vagy áldozatok* ['Culprits or Victims'] Jaffa Kiadó 2015; *A Horthy-rendszer antiszemitaizmusának mérlege. Diszkrimináció és társadalompolitika Magyarországon, 1919-1944* ['The Balance Sheet of the Horthy Regime's Antisemitism: Discrimination and Social Policy in Hungary'] Jelenkor Kiadó, 2016.

revelation that one of the officially celebrated former heroic street urchins [‘pesti srácok’]) had actually assumed the identity of a genuine but now dead street fighter. (Strangely, the Hungarian government does not seem to understand that world opinion, once so greatly fascinated by the spectacle of armed children in revolutionary Budapest, now associates the phenomenon with unfortunate African boys and girls forced to commit horrible atrocities in the ranks of terrorist armies.) Note that today the 1956 Institute, much reduced in size, is facing grave financial difficulties, demonstrating that in Hungary only government-supported research institutes have a secure future.

One must admit that neither Ungváry nor his colleagues have suffered any further hardships from this affair, just as in general, proudly “illiberal” Hungary does not legally prosecute its dissidents. Many of those, however, whose income and promotion depend on the authorities, that is an increasingly large segment of the population, tend to behave more and more cautiously. Only dissent by a small minority is tolerated. Ungváry himself does not seem to care. In 2016, for instance, at the 1956 commemoration held in front of the Hungarian Parliament Building, he provoked regime supporters by loudly blowing a whistle, so as to drown the speech of the Prime Minister. Attacked by an Orbán supporter, he suffered a small cut on his face but went on blowing his whistle, all to the delight of the news photographers.

In the same year, Ungváry defended his thesis (entitled *A Horthy rendszer mérlege* [‘The Balance Sheet of the Horthy Regime’]) for the doctoral degree of the Academy of Sciences, a significant achievement which puts him just a step away from a highly respected and well-remunerated academic membership. In addition to historical monographs and other scholarly works, Ungváry has long been putting out a veritable stream of newspaper articles, essays and commentaries. There are also his many public lectures, radio and TV interviews, most of them longer and more substantial than is customary in the United States. Ungváry regularly lambasts corruption, cravenness, the insolence of office, and greed. One such attack, against a former judge of the Constitutional Court, became a complicated lawsuit involving the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which ruled in Ungváry’s favor, but then his opponent started a new lawsuit against him (see [origo.hu](http://origo.hu), June 2, 2010; [nol.hu](http://nol.hu) July 12, 2010, and [index.hu](http://index.hu), December 3, 2013).

More recently, Ungváry destroyed, with apparent glee, a wildly popular myth according to which Jenő Fuchs, an early Olympic sabre champion of Jewish origin not only fought bravely in World War I as an army officer, but in World War II, while toiling in a Jewish forced labor company, he showed exemplary bravery in combatting the Soviet troops. For his heroism, Fuchs was said to have received the Knight’s Cross on the Iron Cross from a German divisional commander. That so many Hungarians readily accepted such a mad tale—only a small part of which is related here—shows the utter confusion among the public regarding the behavior of German Wehrmacht officers toward Jews, and the Hungarian army’s treatment of Jewish forced laborers at the Russian front. In reality, Jenő Fuchs survived the war and the Holocaust simply because the Horthy government had exempted him, and all Jewish Olympic champions, from the anti-Jewish laws. These particular exemptions even the later fascist Arrow Cross regime respected. (Attila Petschauer, another Jewish Hungarian Olympic champion, who died in Soviet captivity, had been illegally inducted into labor service and transported to the front.) It is quite comical that almost nothing of the complex fairy tale about Jenő Fuchs has turned out to be true.

What counts is that here again Ungváry has given proof his is judiciousness (Ungváry 2017:44).

More a free-lance-scholar than academic professional, Ungváry feels free to criticize his fellow-historians, which is a delicate task in a small country where public personalities tend to know each other intimately. Because he has done so much research in the archives, his arguments are not easy to challenge. Such was the case, for example, in the much-debated affair of the former Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie Sergeant László Kristóf, whom the Communist regime had hanged in 1958. The main charge against Kristóf was that, on July 27, 1944, he had participated in the murder of Endre Ságvári, the celebrated martyr of the Communist movement. Yet, Ungváry argued in a major article written in 2005, Kristóf had been innocent. He even suggested that if Ságvári's memorial tablet was not removed from the place where he had been shot dead, a memorial tablet for Sergeant Kristóf ought to be placed next to Ságvári's (Ungváry 2005:31). (For further information on this debate, see Ferenc 2006:17.)

As Ungváry explains, Kristóf was one of the detectives who tried to arrest Ságvári, but he himself was unarmed, and was badly wounded by one of Ságvári's bullets. Or as Ungváry writes: "Kristóf was only doing his duty." But who then, we might ask, was the hero and who the scoundrel? Both sides could not have been simultaneously and equally right. It seems that in this important test case, Ungváry was carrying the ideal of scholarly impartiality too far. Through in-depth investigation, Ungváry proved that on July 27, 1944, when Ságvári and a fellow Communist resister were meeting in a quiet café, four detectives burst upon them. Ságvári resisted arrest; he pulled out his revolver, killed one of the detectives and wounded two others. He then tried to flee but was felled and killed by one of the wounded detectives' bullet.

Ungváry was right to argue that the judge at the 1958 trial, which resulted in the hanging of Kristóf, acted most unfairly by glorifying Ságvári and calling Kristóf a torturer and vile murderer. At war's end, Kristóf was hiding on a farm and worked as a laborer. Acting upon a denunciation, the Communist police arrested him thirteen years after the event. He, too, resisted arrest, tried to flee but was shot, in the same leg as in 1944.

In 2007, the post-Communist court rehabilitated Kristóf. Meanwhile, the Hungarian nationalists besmirched Ságvári as a vile Stalinist. All the streets, schools, parks, once named after him, have since been re-named. His bust and his memorial tablet were removed from what is today a popular tourist restaurant. Yet it seems very unfair to make Ságvári guilty of Stalinist era crimes which he might never have committed. Indeed, as a radical activist and a "domestic" and not a "Muscovite" Communist, he might well have fallen victim to the post-war Stalinist purges. Lurking in the background of today's discussions is Endre Ságvári's Jewish origins. While no court has ever mentioned this fact, it was, and probably still is, on everybody's mind.

The Ságvári-Kristóf affair brings us closer to such major issues discussed in Ungváry's book on the Hungarian occupation troops, as the rights and duties of the inhabitants of an occupied country, and the rights and obligations of the occupier. Is it the right and duty of a citizen actively to resist an occupying power, even if this is likely to bring brutal retaliation upon the heads of his fellow-citizens? Does the occupier have the right to exact bloody revenge for the civilian population's real or imagined support of armed partisans? Is a policeman doing his duty or is he acting as a traitor when he arrests a person who is fighting an illegal government? There can be little doubt that, in the summer of 1944, Hungarians lived under an illegal government forced upon Regent Miklós Horthy by the German occupation army.

The pre- and post-World War I international conventions, signed at The Hague and Geneva, tried to legislate on all the above issues, but during World War II the effect of these conventions in Eastern Europe was negligible. (In contrast, the German occupiers in Western and Northern Europe respected the international conventions, at least until provoked into retaliations.) Yet, as Ungváry shows, after the war many Hungarian soldiers, from generals down to privates were imprisoned or executed for their real or alleged violation of the laws of war. What made the World War II situation so particularly terrible in Ukraine and Belorussia, where the Hungarian occupation forces operated, was that these countries were what the US historian Timothy Snyder calls the "Bloodlands" (Snyder 2010). In Ukraine and its neighbors, there were not one but multiple occupations and multiple resistance groups which fought not only against the occupiers but also against each other. How the Hungarian troops behaved in this bewildering situation is the main subject of Ungváry's book on occupation troops.

Let us make clear here that Ungváry has never claimed such a thing as, for instance, that Sergeant Kristóf's fellow gendarmes, the ones who assembled, escorted, beat, robbed, and deported 437,000 Jews, "had just been doing their duty." Besides condemning the gendarmes' brutality and other excesses, Ungváry would surely also condemn the very participation of the gendarmes in the deportations. The deportations to Auschwitz had been ordered and organized by the same government in whose name Sergeant Kristóf and his colleagues were trying to arrest Endre Ságvári. That government, set up following the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, had allowed the Gestapo, a foreign police organization, to arrest thousands of non-Jewish (and Jewish) politicians and businessmen, and had entrusted the fate of eight hundred-thousand Jews, most of them Hungarian citizens, to Adolf Eichmann, a German SS lieutenant colonel. So then why not accept the argument that it would have been the moral and legal obligation—as also clearly defined by the gendarmes' own code of conduct—to disobey all the orders issued by an illegal government? A handful of gendarmes did disobey and, incidentally, none was punished for it. Nor was there more than a handful of municipal policemen, government functionaries, railroad workers, teachers, doctors and midwives, who reported sick rather than assist in the cramming of hundreds of thousands of men, women, old people, children, babies, and the infirm into cattle cars. In brief, by trying to arrest the resistance leader Ságvári, Sergeant Kristóf was not simply doing his duty; if anything, he was doing the opposite.

Ungváry's first major and immediately popular monograph was a history of the Soviet siege of Budapest between November 1944 and February 1945. Since the original publication in 1998, several versions have appeared in Hungarian, German, and English, and it is often cited by both historians and the general public (Ungváry: 2002).

Budapest was not the only European metropolis in which various armies (in this case, German, Hungarian, Soviet and Romanian) fought bitter battles in the streets and even in apartments. Warsaw, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Vienna and, of course, Berlin shared similar fates, but Ungváry's was the first, and, so far, the only book on events in the Hungarian capital, which discusses the politics, strategic and tactical planning, troop movements, participants, ties, and the fates of innocently involved civilians. He describes military developments with considerable precision, emphasizing Stalin's initial mistake in ordering the Red Army to take the city as if *en marche*, that is not settling down to a lengthy siege but moving rapidly across the city in the direction of Austria. The German high command, on the other hand, was willing to sacrifice its

troops caught in Budapest, so as to protect the precious oil wells in Western Hungary and to delay the arrival of the vengeful Soviet troops on German soil.

Understandably, the Germans, and especially the Austrians among the soldiers hoped that the hitherto despised Americans and not the Russians would be the first to appear in Vienna. For all this, the ruin of Budapest seemed a small price to pay. Characteristically, the German high command only rarely consulted or even informed the commanders of the Hungarian troops in and out of the city.

In the *Siege of Budapest*, Ungváry cleverly mixes relatively dry accounts of troop movements with the more colorful and dramatic histories of small units and even of individuals. Nor are the nearly one million civilians seeking shelter in the cellars of apartment buildings missing from Ungváry's account. Uniquely in Hitler's Europe, between 120,000 and 130,000 Jews survived the war in the two ghettos of the capital or by hiding among the "Christian" population, many of whom were now also hiding as "shirkers" and deserters. Recent research has shown that the relatively large number of Jewish survivors was due primarily to the decision of Ferenc Szálasi's Arrow Cross government and to some neutral diplomats stationed in Budapest, who cleverly played to the Arrow Cross leaders' infantile hope for international recognition.<sup>2</sup>

On Christmas Eve, 1944, the Red Army rapidly completed the encirclement of the capital; such inhabitants of the Buda districts, who happened to be shopping for Christmas in the center of the city, could not get home for several months. The streetcars stopped running, and frantic family members called each other across what had suddenly become the front line. One, almost charming account, reproduced in the book, tells of would-be passengers at the hilltop terminal of the Buda Cogwheel Rail, were astonished to see armed soldiers in strange uniforms mingling among them. The civilians were trying to get home, and the Red Army soldiers were joining the battle in the valley against the Germans and the Hungarians. Contemporary accounts note that the soldiers immediately "liberated" the passengers' watches, an activity that characterized Red Army soldiers everywhere. The soldiers' appetite for watches is easy to explain: at home owning a watch was a huge economic and cultural privilege, granted to only a few.

Ungváry's *The Siege of Budapest* suffers from one serious weakness, namely the near total absence of Soviet and Romanian primary sources. What the two armies did during those months is explained on the basis of a handful of translated accounts and German and Hungarian documents. This might explain why the book so clearly sympathizes with the German and Hungarian defenders, although not with the higher Reich leadership. If nothing else, German and Hungarian soldiers have faces and personalities; Red Army soldiers are mostly statistics. Admittedly, within the city, the German and Hungarian soldiers were on their best behavior: the Germans because they were, after all, among allies, and the Hungarians because their only salvation was to melt into the civilian population. Red Army soldiers, on the other hand, were

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, there is still no English-language translations even of such a cutting-edge publication as László Karsai's *Szálasi Ferenc. Politikai Életrajz* [Ferenc Szálasi: A Political Biography] Balassi Kiadó, 2016.

enraged by having lost so many of their comrades during the siege. Also, the endless fighting that had carried some all the way from Stalingrad to Budapest, and the shortage of supplies had turned many Red Army units into a lawless rabble.

The *Siege of Budapest* is wonderfully illustrated with precise and easily decipherable maps, as well as many pictures. This is less the case with his two major histories of the Hungarian army during the war. It is true that both books, one a general history of the Hungarian armed forces in World War II (Ungváry: 2005), and the other, which is "our" history of the Hungarian occupation troops behind the front, aim primarily at the concerned and historically well-educated reader. Still, one wonders why, especially in the volume on the occupation troops, the postage-size maps are so uninformative, and why the few pictures seem to originate mainly from a handful of amateur soldier-photographers. Ungváry's voluminous history of the Hungarian army in World War II represents an enormous investment in energy and time; consider only the many tables the author put together on, for instance, the army units, large and small, which had seen action during the war. Note, however, that in the history of wars, no matter how detailed and precise, nothing is absolutely clear and final. As Ungváry himself readily admits, some honvéd ['Hungarian national army'] units existed only on paper, especially during the last year of the war; others had lost almost all their personnel to desertion and to Soviet captivity. Still, the German and Hungarian commands listed many as operational units. Nor are we much better off when it comes to casualty statistics. Hungarian reports on the Don catastrophe in the winter of 1942-1943, for instance, underplayed the number of soldiers captured by the enemy and overstated the number of those heroically fallen. In 1944-1945, as the Hungarian army gradually disintegrated, the term "missing in action" increasingly meant soldiers who had changed to civilian clothes and gone into hiding. The Soviets, on their side, liked to boost the statistics on the number of enemy soldiers killed or captured. They also listed as enemy soldiers the thousands of civilians, including women, whom they had driven into captivity as substitutes for the vanished Hungarian soldiers.

Ungváry's two major works on the Hungarian armed forces—let us simplify matters by calling one the History of the Honvéd Army and the other Occupation Troops—contain plenty of shattering information and fresh evaluations marked by outspokenness and independent thinking. Earlier works by others, none of them as comprehensive as the combined two volumes, could not help but serve special interests. In Communist times, criticism of Soviet policy and behavior guaranteed editorial rejection. In more recent studies there has been a tendency to apologize for the continuous defeats of the Hungarian armed forces at the Don River in the winter of 1942-43 and thereafter, by blaming the Germans, or Regent Horthy's evil advisers, or the home front, or individual commanders, but never the army or the country as a whole. The truth, as Ungváry so well demonstrates, is that the entire system functioned poorly because of the over-ambition of the country's leaders and the thoughtless nationalist pride that permeated nearly all strata of society. Hungarians tended to accept official exaggerations about the country's economic and military capabilities, and the Hungarian warrior's alleged extraordinary martial qualities. In addition, there was anti-Semitism, which had corrupted minds. For instance, only in 1938, at the time of the first anti-Jewish law, did a few dozen Hungarian artists, musicians and writers, such as Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Zsigmond Móricz and István Csók condemn the inhumanity and unconstitutionality of such measures. Thereafter, no intellectuals or artists protested publicly

against the persecution of the Jews, although many of the same elite did not hesitate to speak up against fascism and even against the German alliance. (Incidentally, at least until the German occupation in 1944, none suffered any serious hardship as a consequence.)<sup>3</sup>

It should be added that, among other evils, official anti-Semitism turned even the lowest private at the front into the unchallenged master of the Jewish forced laborers' lives.

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It all began in World War I, as did everything else in Europe in recent times. Having put over eight million of its citizens into uniform, which represented about seventeen percent of the total population, and having sacrificed well over a million lives, the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary still lost the war in 1918, economically, politically, and militarily. This fact many in the Hungarian ruling elite and in much of the population forever refused to believe.

Just before the end of World War I, the victorious Entente alliance declared nine of the eleven ethnic groups in multinational Austria-Hungary victims of national oppression, and two ethnic groups, the Austrian Germans and the Hungarians, to be their oppressors. The Austro-Germans and the Hungarians were also made responsible for the war and all the suffering. The Entente's punitive measures, sealed in the treaty of Trianon in 1920, included limiting the Hungarian national honvéd army to 35,000 mercenaries, trained and equipped only for defense. The Hungarian government successively violated this clause of the treaty, although on a much more modest scale than happened in Weimar Germany. The soldiers of this Trianon Army were later used as instructors, while the officer corps, originally made up of former Habsburg army professionals, was gradually replaced by more nationalistic younger officers who generally sympathized first with Mussolini's fascism, and later with German National Socialism. In fact, there was little difference between the career officer corps and the civilian bureaucracy, both of which swore to the counter-revolution, which had replaced a Soviet-style republic of councils in 1919. They believed in territorial revisionism, meaning the re-establishment of pre-1918 Greater Hungary. They also wished the country to rid itself of most of its Jews. Whether this was to be done peacefully, or if necessary by force, was one of the main issues separating the moderate conservative elite from the radical, socially inclined, pro-Nazi elite. Not until the Arrow Cross take-over in October 1944, can one say that one of the two groups managed to establish—with German help—absolute supremacy in the state. Hungary had a multi-party parliament but power was uneasily shared, through the rather pliant agency of Regent Miklós Horthy, by representatives of the two dominant camps.

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<sup>3</sup> See Gyula Juhász, "Hungarian Intellectual Life and the 'Jewish Problem' During World War II." In Randolph L. Braham, and Bela Vago, eds. *The Holocaust in Hungary Forty Years After*. Social Science Monographs and Institute for Holocaust Studies of the City University of New York and Institute for Holocaust Studies of the University of Haifa. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1985, 53-73.



Hungary's pro-German orientation seemed to pay off between 1938 and 1941 when, with German permission and help, Hungary regained a substantial part of its historic territories from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Strangely, the new, German (and at first also Italian) ordered territorial settlements were ethnically much fairer than those of the post-World War I treaties imposed by the great democracies. During the whole period Hungary reserved a great deal of freedom of movement. Now the country contained large German, Slovak, Ruthene (Rusin), Romanian, Serb, and Slovene minorities, which was causing many headaches to the army high command. The German SS claimed all the young ethnic Germans for itself, which the Hungarian government was actually quite pleased to grant. Things were more difficult with the draftees from the other minorities who often spoke no Hungarian, and were at best unenthusiastic warriors. Meanwhile, the army had converted all those of Jewish origin, even highly decorated officers in the reserve, into "auxiliary labor servicemen," thus depriving the armed forces of thousands of badly needed paymasters, medical doctors, pharmacists, engineers, and skilled artisans. This, if nothing else, bears testimony to the Hungarian elite's selfish and yet also greatly mixed-up and contradictory policy toward the Jews. The twenty-one anti-Jewish laws and hundreds of decrees promulgated between 1938 and 1941 opened up unheard-of professional and business opportunities for the Christian middle class, especially as many skilled Jewish professionals were now digging pitches at the Eastern front. Yet the same Horthy regime did not deprive the Jews at home of their personal freedom or of the chance of earning a living and living in their own homes. And while Hungarian government forces committed in two major massacres of Jews even before the German occupation in March 1944, more than 800,000 Jews and Christians of Jewish origin lived an almost normal life. This was a nearly unique development in Hitler's Europe.

Everything changed drastically in the spring of 1944, as a result of the German military occupation of Hungary. On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union causing Germany's allies to join in the campaign so as to secure Hitler's support for their various and mutually incompatible national goals. Note that all through the war, the Hungarian government claimed to be driven only by anti-Bolshevism, the need to crush forever the Red Beast, and not to cherish any territorial ambitions. Yet now Ungváry tells us that, in September 1941, Horthy, Prime Minister Bárdossy, and Chief of Staff General Ferenc Szombathelyi announced to Hitler, at the latter's Eastern headquarters, Hungary's intent to annex some 140 square kilometers of Galician territory that had never belonged to Hungary. Hitler casually agreed to the Hungarian request, but because of disagreements regarding the purpose of the new acquisitions, the issue was shelved in August 1943. Not even after the war were the Poles aware that their great friend, Horthy, had tried to acquire what had been a part of interwar Poland until overrun by the Soviets in 1939 (Ungváry 186-189).

On June 27, 1941, Hungary voluntarily joined in the campaign, sending a woefully ill-equipped, so-called "Rapid Army Corps" to the East. Unfortunately, the Hungarians' Italian-made "tankettes" and bicycle battalions were no substitutes for real tanks and motorized infantry. In late fall, the Rapid Corps returned to Hungary having suffered appalling losses. The brief campaign had shown that the Hungarian soldiers had little appetite for fighting in a conflict in which, unlike the Romanians and Finns, they had no lost territories to retake. The army high command, on the other hand, very much wished to prove the Hungarians' mettle, which even

before the war had led to some ugly incidents. As Ungváry shows, back in 1940, during the peaceful, German- and Italian-arranged re-annexation of northern Transylvania, incessant governmental and military scare propaganda about savage Romanians, led to occasional panic among the soldiers, who began firing at each other, and then in frustrated fury killed Romanian peasants as well as Jews. A year later, when Hungary joined in the German military campaign against Yugoslavia, it was allowed to re-annex the Bachka (Bácska) region in northern Yugoslavia. Soon thereafter, local Hungarian military commanders used the excuse of some very minor partisan activity to raid several towns, killing more than 2,000 Serbian civilians and a thousand Jews. Why the Jews, who were almost exclusively Hungarian-speakers and generally loyal to Hungary? Their massacre shows that for many in the army command, and for many ordinary soldiers and gendarmes, Jews were a special enemy to be disposed of at the first opportunity. It is noteworthy, however, that the same Hungarian army high command, which had ordered "extreme rigor" toward "hostile" Serbs and Jews in the re-annexed Bachka region, subsequently ordered an investigation of the incident. The royal military court tried a number of Hungarian officers whose leaders then fled to Nazi Germany. This was truly a unique event in Hitler's Europe.

During the winter of 1941, the Germans suffered severe setbacks on the Eastern Front, which made it clear even to Hitler that the war might last a long time. Thus in 1942, unlike a year earlier, he requested that all the allied countries take their full share in the fighting. Romanian and Finish troops had been there from the beginning, also the much smaller Slovak and Croatian contingents; Spain and Italy had sent so-called volunteers, in reality mostly army regulars for the great anti-Bolshevik crusade. In addition, genuine volunteers came from almost every European country. But Bulgaria, a German ally, neither declared war on the Soviet Union, nor did it send any soldiers. In Hungary, it was especially the army high command which wanted to share in the German glory by telling Horthy that without large-scale participation in the war, Romania might reclaim northern Transylvania. Thus, in the summer of 1942, Hungary sent an entire army, the Second, counting some 200,000 men to the front. Of them less than one hundred thousand were combat soldiers and nearly one fourth were Jewish, Romanian, Slovak, and Serbian "labor service men." Actually, they were slaves to whom no uniforms, no warm clothing, no boots had been issued, and with whom their commanders and guards could often do what they wished.

Because of the ensuing disaster on the Don, many legends and accusations circulated then and later on why the Hungarian army had been so poorly led and equipped for this war of all wars. Ungváry disposes of the legends, especially of the one which says that the Hungarian government had deliberately sent out the politically unreliable and the physically weak, and gave them only a few old weapons, so as to be able to build a strong army at home for the final settling of accounts with Hungary's neighbors. Ungváry explains that, contrary to many beliefs, the career soldiers regarded a front-line assignment a key to professional advancement, and that the high command sent out some of its best regiments and the best equipment it had. Unfortunately, the armed forces were short on fighter planes, artillery, machine guns, tanks, trucks, even rifles and winter clothing for such a large force. The 2<sup>nd</sup> army, like incidentally much of the German Wehrmacht, traveled on foot and in horse-drawn wagons. The Hungarian government, from Regent Horthy down, committed a grave crime by not simply informing Hitler that the country had no adequate forces available for this major war, and that therefore no

Hungarians could be sent to the front. Suffering from a constant shortage of men, Germany would have scarcely been able to force the Hungarians to do what they did not want to do. Remember that the Germans were powerless against the Bulgarian decision to stay away from the Barbarossa campaign! Nor could Hitler furnish the armored divisions the Hungarians kept requesting as reinforcement. In 1942, the Hungarian leaders still concentrated on the perceived need to win Hitler's favor against the Romanian, Slovak, and South Slav competition.

The German high command assigned a two-hundred-kilometer-long sector at the Don River to the Hungarians' so-called light divisions, each of which mustered only two instead of the usual three infantry regiments. Even the neighboring Italians and Romanians were better equipped than they. So it came that when the Red Army offensive began, in January 1943, at the city of Voronezh, the Hungarians put up only little resistance, and within a few days, the whole army was struggling in the extreme cold and deep snow to get away as far as possible from the Russian tanks. Thousands of soldiers had been sent to the front without any weapons in the hope that those going home would hand over their rifles. Now most of those carrying a rifle threw it away in the not unjustified expectation that the Red Army would let go those not carrying a weapon.

No doubt, the retreating German troops dealt harshly with the Hungarians among them. German soldiers chased out the Hungarians from the peasant huts, which could mean death in the icy night. Hungarian soldiers were pushed back when trying to climb on German transport, but in an extreme situation individuals and groups are mostly on their own, and the Hungarians proved to be weaker. What made the situation even more discouraging was that the 2<sup>nd</sup> army commander, Colonel General Gusztáv Jány, used the occasion to call the half-frozen and starving refugees a miserable rabble and ordered that even the wounded and the sick to stay and die where they happened to be (Nemeskürty 1972:123).

At last, the Germans managed to solidify the frontline while most of the remaining Hungarians, maybe forty percent of the original contingent were recalled home. After the war, a Communist-inspired people's court charged General Jány with all sorts of crimes he had not committed, and he was executed in 1947. Yet his real crime was that of nearly the entire Hungarian military and political elite's willingness to shift responsibility to others, in this case to ordinary soldiers. Many of the elite also suffered from incurable nationalist conceit and were willing to apply the most ruthless methods to save their own so-called honor. When one considers, however, how many German war criminals of general's rank died in bed after the war as honored members of West German society, then one must feel that General Jány was a particularly luckless man.

Actually, not all the survivors of the Second Army went home; those who remained in Ukraine received some reinforcements from home so as to form a Hungarian occupation army behind the front line, which is the subject of the last Ungváry book surveyed here. It appears that the creation of a relatively large occupation army actually represented a success of Hungarian diplomacy. By conceding this force to the Germans, the government avoided sending troops either to the Russian front or to German-occupied parts of Yugoslavia where they were wanted to help in the anti-partisan campaigns. Behind it all loomed the desperate German shortage of men, which caused Germany to rely more and more on the assistance of their unreliable allies and on local volunteers. In the Hungarian occupation zone of Ukraine, for instance, local anti-

partisan volunteers outnumbered the Hungarian soldiers. To be more precise, in 1942 only 56,000 German policemen, including the SS killer commandos operated in the entire vast Polish and Soviet occupation area. In the specific Hungarian occupation zone, in 1943, as Ungváry reports, 90,000 Hungarian soldiers, 104,000 Soviet-citizen volunteers, and 250,000 "village guards" attempted to maintain order and to combat the partisans. Inevitably, the large number of non-German allies and volunteers caused very serious problems to the German high command.

The Hungarian occupation army's area of the operation extended over about half a million square kilometers, five times the size of Trianon Hungary. Its operational zone included the Pripet Marshes, a huge area of bogs, islands, and waterways, with hardly a road available for transport, and with very poor people barely eking out a living. The Pripet had always been an ideal hiding place for fugitives and partisans, except that hunger and the need for shelter in the winter drove those inside periodically outside.

By 1943, there had been an important political change at home. Even before the battles of Stalingrad and El Alamein, the Regent dismissed the far too pro-German prime minister László Bárdossy and appointed the more moderate and cautious Miklós Kállay as prime minister. Following the Don catastrophe in January 1943, the Kállay government engaged in a highly complex foreign political game meant to reassure the Germans while beginning secret negotiations with the Western powers for an eventual armistice. Surrendering to the Soviets was not even considered, although the Red Army was the one approaching the Hungarian border and not the Anglo-American troops. The Hungarian occupation troops in Ukraine formed a part of this terribly difficult policy. Ungváry makes clear that this time the government genuinely neglected its soldiers in the East. What on the Don River was called a division but was in reality a "light division" was now called a "light division" when in reality it was no more than a brigade, sometimes only a reinforced regiment with not more than a few thousand infantrymen.

Lower level commanders of the occupation forces regularly complained about their soldiers wearing ragged uniforms, and lacking shirts, underwear, and boots in good condition. On the other hand, for the Hungarian soldiers, occupation duty rarely carried a lethal risk. Partisans seldom fired on Hungarian soldiers, and the casualties sometimes amounted to less than a dozen in a month. Desertions to the Soviet side were common among Slovak forced laborers, but just as at the Don front, Jewish forced laborers very seldom deserted.

At this point Ungváry presents his great surprise at least to the non-specialized reader: about sixty percent of the Hungarian occupation troops were not ethnic Hungarians, but members of the ethnic minorities. Add to these the Hungarian Jewish forced laborers, whom the army treated as pariahs, not as Hungarians. In order to understand the outlandishness of the general situation in the East, consider that during the last two years of the war, a German uniform was often hiding an Ukrainian, a Russian a Pole, an Estonian, a Latvian, a Lithuanian, a Western or Northern European volunteer to the SS, an Asian, or someone from the Caucasus, whether he had volunteered for service or had been forcibly inducted. Even today it is little known in Europe and in the United States that a million Soviet citizens served in German uniform during the war; now, thanks to Ungváry, we are also becoming aware of how inordinately high was the proportion of local ethnic volunteers in the Hungarian occupation zone. The largest voluntary force were the so-called village guards, who had no uniform and possessed only makeshift weapons. They were the peasants' answer to periodic raids by the partisans. All this that was

only a part of the troubles the German and Hungarian generals in charge of operations had to face in occupied Ukraine. There was also the problem of entire groups deserting the Ukrainian militia and police to join the partisans. Conversely, entire groups of partisans emerged from the forest camps alleging an ardent desire to oppose the Bolshevik enemy. Even the Ukrainian SS divisions knew desertions and changes over to the Soviet partisan side.

Axis and Soviet wartime propaganda were in unwanted agreement that the conflict behind the German front-line was between Soviet-led Communist partisans on the one side, and the Axis armies as well as their local helpers on the other side. Reality was far more complex, however. How indeed should we classify the numerous Polish underground fighters in Western Ukraine, who belonged mainly to the pro-West Home Army, and who relentlessly opposed the German occupiers, the Polish Communist partisans, the Soviet partisans, the Ukrainian nationalist partisans. Polish Home Army soldiers sometimes also hunted down Jews. Or how to classify the Ukrainian nationalists who were divided into mutually suspicious factions, and who fought and killed Ukrainian "traitors" as well as members of the Polish ethnic minority, Russian civilians and Russian partisans, real or suspected Communists, and, of course, Jewish partisans and Jewish refugees in hiding. All this will be easier to understand by considering that in Eastern Europe, the German-Soviet conflict was complemented, nay often overshadowed, by wars of independence as well as civil and ethnic wars. In brief, the German—and Soviet—occupations had opened the way to full-scale ethnic cleansing.

From Estonia in the north to Bulgaria and Macedonia in the south, the goal of political activists was to get rid of one or both of the major occupiers as well as of all ethnic minorities in what each particular group considered its "homeland." Not only was Poland to become exclusively the country of Poles, and a finally free Ukraine the country of Ukrainian-speakers, but even Czechoslovakia was to be the home, again exclusively, of the Czechoslovak as nation. Never mind that such a nation has never existed. The trouble was that each group had a different conception of where the borders of the fatherland should lie. It was the particular tragedy of the Jews that they had no country and no protectors, and that East Europeans tended to see them simultaneously as Christ killers, capitalist exploiters, Soviet agents, godless Communists, and a particularly unwanted ethnic minority.

In the Western parts of the Hungarian occupation zone, the Polish underground and Ukrainian nationalists worked out informal truce agreements with the local Hungarian commanders. Moreover, all sides were also in outspoken agreement not to oppose the ongoing extermination of the Jewish population, as initiated and mostly carried out by the SS *Einsatzgruppen*. From Riga and Vilnius in the north to Odessa and Sevastopol in the south, German Wehrmacht units, local militias, and a good number of civilians actively assisted in the massacre of Jews. Ungváry convincingly demonstrates that while the Hungarian occupation troops did not lift a finger on behalf of the persecuted Jews, they only very rarely took an active part in the mass executions. Instead, the Hungarians generally acted as guards of the Jews and escorted them to the place of execution. To a few anxious soldiers their commanding officers explained that there was no need to worry for the victims were, after all, "only Jews." Again and again, Ungváry shows that, in their letters home and in their diaries, Hungarian officers and soldiers cynically or indifferently registered the execution by the SS of thousands and thousands of Jews. It seems not to have occurred to anyone that by international and also Hungarian law,

occupation troops were obliged to protect the lives of the innocent civilians under their care.

A significant change in the Occupation Army's behavior toward the Jews came early in 1943 when the new minister of defense, Colonel General Vilmos Nagy, ordered that Hungarian Jewish forced laborers were to be treated not as pariahs but as useful members of the Hungarian armed forces. Vilmos Nagy's action was inspired both by his own humanity and by the Kállay government's desire favorably to impress the Western Allies.

Two of Ungváry's major arguments created quite a sensation in the Hungarian public. The first was his straightforward, factual reporting on the many incidents of Hungarian soldiers shooting Ukrainian civilians and setting fire on hundreds if not thousands of villages. The second was his contention that the Soviet-led partisans played only a limited political and military role in the Hungarian occupation zone, and that most of those killed by the Hungarian troops were not Communist partisans and their local helpers but innocent civilians mostly simple peasants. Interestingly, however, the strongest objection to Ungváry's two contentions came not from the right but from the left. At a memorable public debate held in the Kossuth Club in Budapest on February 18, 2016, Tamás Krausz, a professor at Budapest University and one of Ungváry's former teachers, insisted on the efficiency, discipline, and superb dedication of the Communist partisans. They, Krausz argued, enjoyed the active support of the local population, except for the traitors and the fascist sympathizers; Krausz also demonstrated, or wished to demonstrate the corruption and cruelty of the Hungarian commanders from generals down to junior officers. For this, he referred mostly to the confessions of Hungarian officers at wartime and postwar Soviet and postwar Hungarian trials. Krausz's passionate argumentation would have been more effective if he had admitted that the Soviet trials were not exactly characterized by a patient quest for truth and nothing but the truth. It is indeed very disturbing to read some Hungarian officers confessing of having committed capital crimes while using Leninist-Stalinist terminology. Note, however, that not all Soviet trials were show trials, and that in court most defendants tried to explain away their misdeeds. Nor were all the sentences unduly harsh. In any case in 1955 the last of the Hungarian POWs were repatriated.

Tamás Krausz was correct in emphasizing that no matter what some German historians, and Ungváry himself say about Soviet plans for attacking Nazi Germany after 1939, and about Hitler's being a preventive war, the fact remains that it was the German army that, on June 22, 1941, attacked the Soviet Union; that the Red Army was caught unawares, and that the Germans' unprovoked aggression caused indescribable devastation and suffering for untold millions. Consequently, the Red Army amply deserved its hard-earned victory, although some, or rather very many of its soldiers demonstrated much cruelty, primitive instincts and a terrible lack of discipline. Still, as Krausz correctly stated, the soldiers were seldom driven by a desire for revenge. Hungary, too, had attacked the Soviet Union and that without any provocation; the alleged Soviet bombing of Kassa (Košice) was a welcome excuse for the Hungarians who, from Regent Horthy down, had already decided to join in the Barbarossa campaign. (For a discussion in English of Hungary's entry into the war, see Dreisziger 1968: 167-178; Sakmyster 1994:267). Two years later, when it became clear that Germany would lose the war, the Hungarian leaders showed utter naivety in believing that by surrendering to the far-away Anglo-Americans, their country would somehow be spared the Red Army's drive across Hungary. The example of Romania proves that a timely surrender to the Red Army would have spared much of Hungary,

even Budapest, from utter devastation. After all, Bucharest and Romania in general had not been destroyed. Admittedly, Ungváry does not much speculate on these matters, de lets the reader draw his conclusion from his factual presentations.

In summary, one wishes that the Hungarian occupation troops had behaved more humanely, and that their commanders had thought at least of their own personal future by ordering greater lenience toward the population and especially toward the Jews whom everybody was kicking. Still, one must recognize that in a war in which guerrillas and partisans are particularly active, the dread of the soldiers from ordinary civilians possibly carrying a concealed weapon (the notorious Vietnam peasants in "black pajamas" hiding a hand-grenade), almost inevitably leads to utter ruthlessness and the massacre of innocents. It is enough to remember the German troops shooting Belgian civilians in 1914; the German and Italian cruelties in partisan infested Balkans during World War II; the German SS burning the French village of Oradour in 1944; the French parachutists torturing Muslim suspects in Algeria in the 1950s, or finally, the American killings of mostly unarmed civilians in Korea, Vietnam, and in Iraq. Thus, the conclusion must be that the Hungarian troops in Ukraine behaved within the general range of the behavior of occupation armies in partisan infested regions. Disconcertedly, some high-ranking German officers in the anti-Nazi resistance, who in 1944 gave their lives in the struggle against Nazism, had not hesitated to order the mass shooting of suspected partisans and Jews in the Eastern war. In brief, partisan war almost inevitably brings about horrible acts of cruelty on both sides not only against the enemy but against suspected traitors and civilians. It was the mass extermination of the Jews, almost none of whom was involved in a resistance activity that made German—and the Hungarian—behavior in Eastern Europe so particularly odious. Equipped with this distressing knowledge, we are even better able to appreciate Krisztián Ungváry's most valuable scholarly discoveries and many other achievements.

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