

The structure and command system of the Hungarian army in the War of Independence of 1848–1849

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The War of Independence in 1848-1849 is one of the most glorious chapters in Hungarian history. The Hungarian Army, set up within a few months, managed to hold victory over one of the best armies of Europe of that time. The paper deals with the organizing, as well as the command and control system of the Hungarian Army. Special attention is paid to the organizing of the Home Defence (Honvéd) battalions, the most efficient units of the Hungarian Defence forces.

Introduction

The period of the revolution and war of independence of 1848–1849 is an outstanding and determining epoch in the history of Hungary. During this one and a half year time there were more changes in the country than there had been in the previous decades. The so called 1848 April Laws triggered irreversible social changes. The Hungarian administration and legislation were given an entirely different image by the activity of the government independent from the Vienna Court and responsible only to the Hungarian legislature. The country made tremendous efforts in order to reduce its distance from Western Europe.

For the beginning of that activity favourable conditions were created by the Springtime of Nations of 1848, nearly paralyzing the European Great Powers, especially the Austrian Empire, which held Hungary in dependency. In March the revolutions in Vienna, Pest, and Milan generated such a shock which took the Vienna Court several months to overcome. Special difficulties were caused by the Lombardian revolution which got external support and escalated into a war. Until Marshal Radetzky, the Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian Empire did not eliminate this hot spot the leadership in Vienna led wait and see policy in connection with Hungary.

By the autumn of 1848, however, the situation had changed and the liquidation of achievements of the Hungarians and the restoration of their previous subordination became top priorities for Vienna. It was obvious for both sides that there was no room for any political compromises. From the summer of 1848 the organization of the army

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was in full progress. Infantry battalions, cavalry companies and artillery batteries were set up, military command and supply system was established at an incredible pace. Meanwhile, more and more Imperial and Royal units arrived on the border of the country. The Hungarian forces, after fighting against the Serb insurrection and later successfully battling against the army of Jellacic, the viceroy of Croatia, were forced to meet a newer and greater challenge. From December the case of “country and progress” was decided by the events, successes and disasters on the battlefield.

The European public supported the Hungarian case, however, the official Holy Alliance considered the support of the “status quo” as desirable. Understandably, only the latter had a direct effect on the events so that from the summer of 1849 the Hungarian army did not only have to fight against the stronger Austrian army, possessing larger reserves, but also the frightfully huge Russian czarist armies. Under the worsening circumstances, and due to the numerical superiority the Hungarian armed forces had no other choice than to capitulate but their persistence, firmness and successes made them acknowledged world wide.

The Hungarian Army, set up within a few months, managed to hold victory over one of the best armies of Europe of that time and made it obvious that Austria is unable to achieve a decisive success. The Emperor of Austria was forced to ask the Czar of Russia for help, to humiliate himself in front of him and that was indisputably due to the Home Defence army.

One of the most significant tasks, therefore, in the post-revolution period of March 1848 was the creation of the new Home Defence army. Hungary, however, lacked even the most basic conditions which proved to be the main difficulty. There was no war industry, or independent military administration, or organs of command etc. That was the era when the country had to establish its first independent standing army. Obviously enough, the only model for that army could be the Imperial and Royal armed forces, so that it is reasonable to examine its structure, and command system.

The structure and command system of the Imperial and Royal Armed Forces

The leadership of the armed forces of the Austrian Empire was centered in the Vienna Court War Council. Its President had two deputies, and the actual matters were managed by 14 departments. The departments dealt with military, economic, political, and legal matters and only the military department was under military leadership. The most important institutions of imperial scope were the Chief Quartermaster Corps, Directorate of Engineer Corps, and Directorate of Artillery.

The Empire was divided into 12 General Headquarters (General Commando). Out of them 5 were located in Hungary and its annexed parts and in then separate Transylvania. Their centres were in Buda (Hungary); Nagyszeben (Transylvania); Zagráb (Croatia); Pétervárad (Slavonia); Temesvár (Bánát). The function of these military administration institutions were as follows: protecting the order and security in the country or region; commanding the troops stationed in their territories; supervising the activities of the installations, institutions, and organs. Their superior organ was the Court War Council. The territory of one of the most important General Headquarters , the Hungarian, was split into six divisions each consisting of two brigades. This division had, however, clearly administrative character and meant the coordination of the armed forces in that particular region. On the territory of the other General Headquarters there were proportionally fewer divisions and brigades.

On the territory of the Buda General Headquarters there were other important military organs too. The Artillery Divisional Headquarters with a scope to all five General Headquarters and coordinating the activities of the field, and fortification artillery and also the artillery stores, were stationed in Pest. Also there were located the independent headquarters of the carts.

The Hungarian District Directorate of Engineering Corps supervising castles, fortifications, and forts and a Department of the General Quartermaster Corps were also stationed in Buda. A committee of Vestimentary and Economic Supervisory Board was stationed in Óbuda, and a sappier task force in Komárom. The Field Surgeon Directorate, the Superintendence and the horse-breeding establishments of Bábolna and Mezőhegyes were also in the subordination of the General Headquarters.

Apart from these extremely important organs of command and support the great majority of the army stationed in Hungary was comprised by troops. The Empire had 58 infantry regiments in arms out of which 13 were recruited from Hungary and 2 from Transylvania. The Imperial and Royal Army had one ranger regiment and 12 independent ranger battalions without any Hungarian personnel. Out of 5 garrison-stationed infantry battalions only one was recruited from Hungary. The Border Guard Provinces were obliged to establish another 18 regiments and one boat battalion out of which the two regiments from Transylvania had Hungarian personnel.

The Imperial Cavalry comprised 37 cavalry regiments – 12 hussar, 8 armoured, 6 dragoons, 7 chvaligeer, and 4 lancer regiments. (The last two categories were hussar-like light cavalry.) the hussar regiments were recruited from Hungary and Transylvania.

The field artillery of the Empire comprised 5 regiments and all of them and also the engineers troops were recruited from other provinces of the Empire.

Each regiment had its own region of recruitment with its Recruitment Head Office each with 2–3 recruiting offices. Recruits, whose number was set by Parliament, were taken (often by force) from these regions to the regiments. After 1830 the service time was 10 years.

The infantry regiments consisted of three or four battalions, and each battalion had six companies. Besides the battalions the regiments also had two grenadier companies making up one group. They usually formed a grenadier battalion with groups from other regiments. One infantry battalion counted approximately 1,200 men. In peace-time they were stationed in separate garrisons.

A dragoon or armoured cavalry (that is heavy cavalry) regiment consisted of 3 groups while a light cavalry regiment comprised four groups. The groups consisted of two companies apiece. One hussar company counted 218 men.

Artillery was also structured in regimental frameworks. Every regiment consisted of four battalions with 4–6 companies in each. When it was necessary one company was able to set up several batteries. The engineer troops consisted of five battalions – an eight-company sapper battalion, a six-company miner battalion, and three pioneer battalions, none of them stationed in Hungary.

In early 1848 24 of the 45 battalions of the 15 Hungarian- and Transylvanian-recruited infantry regiments, and two out of the 5 grenadier battalions were stationed in Hungary. Just four of the hussar regiments were at home. In Hungary, Croatia, Slavonia and Transylvania there were 16 battalions and 12 cavalry regiments of foreign recruitment. These figures indicate that the newly established Hungarian government had at its disposal – in a limited way – 43 battalions and 122 cavalry companies.

The strength of the Imperial armed forces was different in peace-time and in war-time. In peace-time it was about 436,000 strong and one third of the men was on long term leave. This force was commanded by 250 generals, 10,800 staff and senior officers, and 29,000 subalterns and cadets. The war-time strength can only be estimated because then the skeleton 3rd battalions were beefed up and the Austrian Landwehr, the Hungarian Border Guard Province troops and the gentry insurrection also strengthened the army. In all there could be around 700,000 – 750,000 men in arms.

There was a significant difference too between battle orders in peace-time and war-time. In war-time the regimental organization practically ceased functioning. Brigades were created from 3–5 battalions and an artillery battery. A division usually consisted of two infantry brigades and one cavalry brigade and there were pure cavalry divisions too. The divisions, normally three, comprised an army corps which also had reserve artillery and engineers troops. A field army consisted of several army corps with its separate reserve artillery, bridging equipment and other support troops.

The war-time command of the army was basically the responsibility of the General Staff. The role and task of this body both in peace-time and war-time are given various interpretations by different regulations, field manuals, and military historical works. Its importance and significance, however, has not been questioned.

For commanding troops, forwarding messages, or realizing their plans warlords always used assistants, adjutants with a passive role limited to execution and management.

With the growing size and sophistication of armies the direct command became impossible for military leaders and the passive assistance was not sufficient. That is why adjutants were relieved from routine management duties and were made do creative work. Their most important duty was marking out camp sites, arranging units on the battlefield, keeping order. They did these jobs on the basis of the Commander-in-Chief's resolution, with great powers. These changes date back in the early XVIIth century in the "Thirty Years' War". Such kind of staff was created in the army of Luis XIV and also King of Sweden Gustav Adolf who too relied on their assistance.

Similar body was established in the Habsburg Empire by Eugen de Savoya which was named "Chief Quartermaster's Staff". Its primary duty was marking out areas for military camps, – which explains the origins of its name – organizing battle order, establishing the order of marches, and conducting military policing.

In later decades the Chief Quartermaster Staff was reorganized several times. In 1757 general Daun proposed Empress Maria Theresia that the staff should be restructured with experts perfectly fit for the duty. After the proposal had been accepted the so called Great Chief Quartermaster Body and Chief Quartermaster Staff were introduced, the latter in direct subordination to the first. Staff officers had a different uniform as a distinguishing tool. The methods of selection were made stricter as well. A staff officer had to be of the proper age, have excellent diplomas, be precise and reliable, without any harmful passions. He had to have a good knowledge of geometry, trigonometry, geography, and the four fundamental military disciplines: the "art of camping", tactics, field fortifications, sieging and defending castles.

After the Seven Years' War the Chief Quartermaster Staff was not disbanded as it had been previously but continued its activity though with a smaller strength. Its basic peace-time activity was military mapping. The most important ability for this kind of work was drawing therefore the structure of the personnel changed accordingly.

The Napoleonic wars fundamentally changed the practice of military leadership. Instead of the slow, easily calculable, frequently camping XVIIIth century tactics with its priority of safe supply, the new military art was based on rapidity, surprise, and unorthodox manoeuvres. The main objective was to prevent the enemy from actions

with fast marches, tactical manoeuvres and forcing it to deliver a decisive battle. All this required a swift and efficient staff work. Meanwhile the rapid manoeuvres required a more systematic structuring of the troops, which increased the burdens on the staff. For managing all these tasks a bigger staff had to be created and deployed with a greater scope. This led to the establishing of General Staffs.

The fundamental duty of the General Staff was organizing, supporting and controlling rapid conduct of marches. The most important duty – in this context – was transforming the Commander-in-Chief's decisions into commands and orders. The route of marches, time calculations, coordination of troop movements, reconnaissance measures were also the responsibility of the General Staff.

Under the leadership of the Chief of General Staff preparatory measures were taken for material support of the marches, transporting stores, supply and re-supply. Sophisticated organization was required by the sustained rapid pace of marches so that depots, hospitals and workshops were pre-deployed wherever it was possible.

Securing marches, the sizes of advance guards, side- and rearguards was also the responsibility of the General Staff. It was necessary to give directions regarding the troops' actions in case of engagement and regarding the possible way and route of retreat. The General Staff also took measures concerning the troops' respite, marked the camps' locations and arranged their security. The necessary documents and logs were kept by General Staff.

Together with the growing number of duties grew the number of General Staff officers too. Besides the General Staff assisting the Commander-in-Chief a separate staff was also created at each army corps. This sort of staff system was first introduced by Napoleon and his adversaries immediately recognised its overwhelming importance.

The restructuring of the Austrian Chief Quartermaster Staff began in 1801 under the leadership of Archduke Karl. He realised that only those officers could possess the proper expertise who had already served in various – or in all if possible – arms and services.

After the Napoleonic wars the Chief Quartermaster Staff whose name remained unchanged due to traditionalism dealt again with the survey of the Empire, made and finalized maps and prepared and compiled military statistical works. The Staff supervised the Milan Military-Geographical Institute and the Vienna Institute of Topography. There could be no military construction works without the permission of the Staff. In peace-time the Staff was 56 strong and in war-time its personnel almost tripled totaling 156 men. In addition to that orderly officers were commissioned at the Staff, whose primary mission was forwarding orders.

Organizing the Hungarian Defence Forces

According to Act 1848/III the King was to exercise his executive powers through the Hungarian ministry as far as military affairs were concerned. The Act mentioned all the administrative organs whose roles were to be taken over by the Hungarian government, however, the Aulic War Council was not included in the list.

Due to the ambiguous text of the Act therefore the Hungarian government was forced to ask for additional measures which clarified its scope regarding its direct powers over the fortifications, military commands, divisional and brigade headquarters and other military institutions in Hungary. A 7th May Royal edict is a significant marker of the successes of all these efforts, in which the King ordered the military commands to submit to the orders of the Hungarian ministry.

Besides gaining control over the regular army in Hungary, in accordance with the XXII Act the establishing of the “National Militia” was also launched. Although the new organ’s fundamental objective would have been securing “personal material security , public order, and interior peace” by the legislators’ ideas, because of the debates over the conscripted army the tasks and structure of the militia quickly changed. At first only citizens with at least half a unit of a land held in villeinage or a real estate of similar value or 100 forints net annual income was to join the new body. By mid April the strength of National Militia had been around 60,000 but only one quarter of them was armed with a rifle and the masses themselves were neither mobile nor trained.

Increasing armed forces, however, was becoming a more and more urgent issue. In regions inhabited by ethnic minorities the tensions were growing since they wanted to gain similar independence that had been gained by the Hungarians. Those frictions grew into armed clashes first in the South of Hungary where army units had to be thrown in against the rebels. The troops – and especially their officers, however, – proved unreliable and were not strong enough. Since the strength of the standing army could have been increased only by beefing up the skeleton battalions, the government’s efforts to bring home the Hungarian recruits from the rest of the Empire did not give immediate results and so a new army organizational structure had to be established.

For this reason on 15 May a resolution was made by the Council of Ministers on creating a 10,000 strong “regular National Militia”. That meant 10 battalions and a cavalry artillery battery where the volunteers were to be taken for a 3-year-long service time. The organizational job was the responsibility of the “National Militia War Council” operating alongside with the Prime Minister’s office. It was structured almost as a ministry with departments of infantry, cavalry, artillery, civil affairs, justice, and economy. The War Council was located in the building of the Prime Minister’s Office

and it moved to Buda, into the block of the Ministry of War only in September. Finally, in late November, the two organs merged simultaneously by the establishing of the unified Defence Forces.

The recruitment of battalions was conducted with the assistance of local administration and involved the recruitment offices of the regular infantry regiments. The officer corps of the battalions was commissioned from the regular regiments and retired officers were also assigned into various positions for active service. The commanders were promoted into majors. The equipment was ensured by the Treasury. The gaps in the armament were bridged by import. These battalions were christened “Home Defence” (Honvéd). The first 10 battalions were followed by another four.

Shortly after their creation the battalions were sent to the South of the country and to the Dráva valley but that force proved insufficient for effective warfare and controlling the border with Croatia. Although the country-level militia battalions and cavalry groups were under organization these units – due to their features – were not deployable for longer field actions. That is why in early August a resolution was made on setting up a voluntary mobile National Militia. The volunteers were taken to four large camps – in Vác, Pápa, Szolnok, and Arad – from where, after a short training, they were sent to the battlefield. These infantry and cavalry units were planned to be deployed until the end of the war.

That was the time too when some irregular guerrilla groups were formed to be transformed later into Honvéd battalions.

Besides increasing the strength of the National Militia and the troops under organization in accordance with the above mentioned Act the newly set up War Ministry tried to ensure the deployment of the troops stationed in Hungary in the interests of the country or exchanging them on troops with Hungary recruits. Colonel Lázár Mészáros, former commander of the 5th hussar regiment was appointed War Minister and took his office in mid May. His first duty was organizing the structure of the ministry but very soon he had to deal with the situation in the South and send troops there. By 2nd July the organization of the Ministry was completed with setting up seven departments. Department I dealt with Transylvania-related issues; Department II – Quartering and departure; Department III – Arms supervision; Department IV – Justice; Department V – Military training establishments; Department VI – Press office; Department VII – Civic catering.

The War Ministry was given the exclusive rights to manage all matters related with troops stationed in Hungary by a 10th July royal edict. Minister of War Mészáros while

trying to get the standing regiments to swear in to the government of Hungary, together with Prime Minister Batthyány, made huge efforts to bring the Hungarian-recruited units home.

In the case of infantry the efforts were rather futile; just a few of the battalions could return. As for the hussar regiments, they returned either legally or illegally except for those ones in Italy.

In September new elements appeared in the process of establishing the army. Prime Minister Batthyány and his government resigned and the ruling of the country was taken over by the National Committee of the Home Defence headed by the previous Minister of Finance Lajos Kossuth. Regent István, the representative of the King in Hungary left the country due to the latest developments. One of the most important factors of all these changes were the deteriorating military situation in Southern Hungary followed by the invasion of Croatian Vice Roy Jellacic.

The military executive organ of the National Committee of Defence was the Ministry of War incorporating the National Militia War Council, which had dealt with similar matters before. Thus the entire field of defence was controlled by this ministry. The changes were also reflected in its structure. Eight departments were created: Presidential, Military, General Staff, Artillery-Armament, Recruitment, Spare-horse, Civil-Economic, Justice, Health, and Border Guard which was established somewhat later. In the same time the still active organs of the former Imperial and Royal military administration were disbanded.

In November the territory of the country was split into eight military districts. The duty of the so called “military counties” consisted of recruitment and command and control of the army units on their territories. In the renewed intensive recruitment in October these organs had significant roles in setting up Honvéd battalions, cavalry groups, artillery batteries and sapper battalions.

By mid-December the infantry battalions totalled 62. Several of the previously established voluntary National Militia troops and the guerrilla units were transformed into Honvéd battalions. In mid-December only ten National Militia battalions had their original name. There were several foreign legions as well in the forming unified Honvéd army.

The development of the cavalry went on with bringing up the returned regiments to full strength and setting up new units. Five other regiments were organized in order to ensure the proper proportion of the cavalry. By mid-December 82 companies were established.

Developing of these two arms and services on the existing bases, thanks to the experienced officer corps, was quite successful artillery, however, proved a much more difficult issue. The creation of this service, without any tradition in Hungary, was launched by a few Hungarian-born officers and also officers and subalterns who took their oaths seriously. Their organizational job was surprisingly fast and fruitful thanks to the careful selection of the recruits who came mainly from the intelligentsia and students.

Establishing engineer troops was similarly unprecedented. The organization began in September with a call seeking artisans for sapper, miner, and pioneer jobs and assignments. After a training course for the recruited civilians and soldiers the 1st Home Defence battalion was established in Pest in November. The 2nd was set up in Pozsony and the 3rd one also in Pest. In December in Kassa the organization of the 4th battalion was in progress. In the Hungarian hold castles sapper companies were set up for the necessary work two in Komárom and two in Pétervárad.

One of the biggest difficulties in the organization of the Home Defence Forces was the formation of a reliable professional military high command. After the breakaway from the Vienna Court the great majority of generals either left the country or did not take up any military service. The situation was similar concerning senior officers too. The only thing the National Committee of Home Defence could do was to ensure fast promotion for the reliable, retired or active former Imperial and Royal officers ready to serve and to commission them in leading positions. In November there were still 3,000 “old” officers serving in the Home Defence Forces, but their number was almost continuously decreasing. Alongside with them suitable civilians were serving, generally clerks, gentry, intelligentsia, who were expected to learn the skills of command and control.

Ensuring the necessary weaponry, materiel, and equipment was the other problem-area. Since the stores were insufficient for the newly established army and the country was not prepared for producing them, it took enormous efforts to ensure the necessary stores. Weapons and ammunition were the most urgently needed items. Until it was possible, Hungary imported them, mainly small arms, infantry weapons, and war industry equipment from the other countries and provinces of the Empire or Western Europe. Meanwhile preparations were made for domestic manufacturing, re-opening old plants and workshops, and converting factories of similar profile. “State Arms Factory” was founded this way and gun- and arms production was also born. Ensuring clothing and footwear posed lesser difficulties.

As a result of this gigantic organization work in mid December the Hungarian military leadership had 100,000 – 110,000 men under arms. The Hungarian Defence Forces had the means for waging a war as far as material and organizational conditions were concerned. However, they lacked experiences, team spirit, and effective central command.

The command and control of the Home Defence army

As it has already been shown, the military high command was conducted by the Ministry of War although Prime Minister Kossuth through his military bureau intervened into its activity several times. In early January after moving the government to Debrecen, the ministry worked with an unchanged structure despite the fact that the need for its reorganization was obvious. These necessary changes were executed only in May when Commander-in-Chief General Görgei was appointed as minister. General Görgei and his aides increased the number of departments and carried out some structural changes as well. As a result the ministry comprised the departments as follows.

The Presidential Department dealt with the confidential issues belonging to the minister and with personal matters. The activity of General Staff will be analysed later. The Military Department had a very complex scope which included matters related with organization of battalions, and also appointments, promotions, retirements, leaves, and disciplinary matters.

A Department of Recruitment, and a Department of Spare Horses, also worked along with the Department of Artillery in which an armament group dealt with the troops' weapons and ammunition supply. There were Departments of Justice, Field Chaplaincy, Military Education, and Police. In the field of supply the Department of Civil Economy and Accountancy had important roles.

On 5th July General Görgei resigned and General Lajos Aulich was appointed as the new Minister of War. During his one-month-long period there were no significant changes in the structure of the ministry.

The most direct effect on the military campaigns was made by the General Staff out of all the departments of the Ministry of War. On the other hand, however, this department was the most difficult to establish and enable to meet the requirements. Its cause was, first of all, the limited number of Hungarian officers serving in the Imperial Chief Quartermaster Staff. In the summer of 1848 only one officer, Lieutenant János Czetz was sent from Vienna into the prospective Ministry of War as a General Staff officer.

The establishing of General Staff was launched in the autumn of 1848. General Antal Vetter was appointed as Chief of General Staff by the government. He was responsible for the General Staff Department which was to be set up within the Ministry of War and for the General Staff officers commissioned at the units. In mid October the strength of General Staff was around 20 men.

The scope of the Ministry of War included:

- mobilization and transportation of troops;
- Chief Military College;
- ensuring maps and country-manuals;
- planning and coordinating operations;
- military-related press and literature;
- roads and bridges;
- Defence plan;
- military installations, fortifications, castles;
- battleship “Mészáros”.

The department was active from early December and its official language was German. It managed the above mentioned issues although the Kossuth bureau also took up similar matters. The two-direction retreat plan submitted to the War Council and accepted on 2nd January was elaborated by General Vetter and Colonel György Klapka.

After the Ministry of War had moved to Debrecen the department directly participated in commanding troops and directing operations, organizing the conditions for the planned military campaign. At that time General Staff was under the command of Colonel Miksa Stein.

There were some efforts made by the department to unify the units' structure. In February a directive was issued to form 4,000–6,000 – strong divisions able for a half-day-long sustained independent activity. The theoretically established 16 divisions, however, practically remained of different sizes and structures.

In April Colonel Stein left the Department and till early June there was no dependable successor. Temporarily, Chief of the Operational Group Captain Richárd Gelich was appointed head of Department. At that time General Klapka, substituting for the Minister of War in leave, had the Department to elaborate the plan for concentration of the Hungarian troops in the vicinity of Komárom. In June Minister of War Görgei appointed Colonel Károly Waldberg as head of Department. General Görgei had also planned the reorganization of the Department but it was not executed. In the last months of the War of Independence the Department was less and less able to meet the expectations.

Besides the ministry in June 1849 by the initiative of General Görgei the Central General Staff Bureau was created in order to coordinate the operations of armies and army corps. The organizational directive identified the following scopes:

- issuing march and battle directives, regulating submissions;
- collecting military historical data, informing press;
- registering personnel, issuing recruitment directives;
- organizing map supply;
- reconnaissance, observing political situation abroad;
- collecting and issuing field manuals;
- commissioning officers.

Each and every Honvéd unit was submitted to the Bureau but the command of troops dispersed all over the country was impossible due to the large distances and the lack of sufficient strength and tools.

There were General Staff officers at the army, army corps, sometimes divisions, who made suggestions to their commanders or worked with maps. The most outstanding of them was József Bayer, who was working alongside with General Görgei and after its creation headed the General Staff Bureau. He was the one who – colonel at the time of the Vilagos capitulation – elaborated those plans having executed which made General Görgei one of the greatest Hungarian military leaders.

Despite the activity of the Ministry of War and General Staff the proper coordination of the Honvéd Army was hardly possible. The most important of the great many causes was the conflict between the political and military leaderships. The splits within General Staff and the distrust to each other also posed serious disadvantage. Finally the relatively isolated theatres – especially Transylvania – also made joint actions difficult.

From February 1849 the Hungarian troops – except for those in Transylvania and some lesser covering units – were concentrated in the region of Eger – Miskolc – Szolnok. That was the time when the first Commander-in-Chief was appointed who had the possibility to coordinate the actions of troops having previously fought in different theatres. General Dembinski, however, was unable to take that chance on the one hand because he knew neither his commanders nor his troops, on the other hand because he had to work in an unknown for him region. The Polish General's style was based on distrust which turned his divisional and corps commanders against him and led – after the defeat at Kápolna – to the “change” of the Commander-in-Chief at Tiszafüred.

In March the unified Defence Forces were already under the command of General Antal Vetter but just for a short time since his ill health prevented him from participating in the military campaign which was to be launched.

After these events General Görgei – who had already proved himself as commander of the Upper Danube Army – was appointed provisional Commander-in-Chief. Only after the successful campaign ceased the mistrust of the political leadership and first of all Kossuth and he was appointed Commander-in-Chief and later Minister of War.

After taking the Buda castle the Hungarian main army should have been reinforced with other units and – by General Klapka's plans – the best for this could have been the army of General Józef Bem, which had just left Transylvania and entered Bánát. It occurred that the Polish General had to take over the post of Commander-in-Chief. General Bem, however, was not willing to do so and returned in Transylvania with his troops. As a result General Görgei continued his offensive with his previous army but was unable to achieve successes against the reorganized and reinforced Austrian army. Besides other causes this weakened his authority.

In July General Mészáros, then General Dembinski were appointed Commander-in-Chief. These government resolutions proved rather improper, mainly because General Dembinski's passivity, permanent, unjustified retreat accelerated the capitulation of the Honvéd army. On 9th August Kossuth appointed General Bem Commander-in-Chief who immediately delivered a battle at Temesvár. However this was an unprepared move and due to the lack of stores the defeat can be taken as unavoidable. Delivering that battle was also a mistake because General Görgei with his army was at Arad and nothing could have prevented the troops from joining hands. In the battle at Temesvár the greatest army of the Hungarian Defence Forces was lost.

The organization of the Honvéd units

For a long time there was no central directive regarding the establishing of the structure of the army so that it varied greatly in various theatres. In the summer of 1848 the combat troops in Southern Hungary were organized into brigades. They comprised three services, however, their strengths were different. In August the troops under the command of Lieutenant General Bechtold had even reserves at their disposal.

In the battle at Pákozd there was no time even for forming brigades so that General Móga divided his army into flanks. The proportion of the various arms and services met the regulations and principles. After the battle there was more time to introduce the proper structures and by late October brigades had been established here too. According to the European practice a brigade usually consisted of five infantry battalions, a few

cavalry companies or groups, and one artillery battery. In the Hungarian army this was modified to three battalions, one-two cavalry companies, and one artillery battery. The five brigades set up by late October, however, were not able to display enough strength in the battle at Schwechat and were defeated.

In November General Görgei, the new Commander-in-Chief, split his army into three divisions with three brigades in one division and two brigades in each of the other two. The brigades were of different strength and consisted of two–four infantry battalions, one–six cavalry companies, and one–three artillery batteries. Later the number of brigades further increased depending on the newer troops directed to the main army. By mid December the strength of the army was over 26,000.

Troops in different theatres of war were already called army corps although they normally did not meet the requirements of corps. In mid January the Bácska Corps comprised 13 battalions, 14 cavalry companies, and 40 field guns while the Bánát Corps consisted of eight battalions, two hussar regiments, and 20 field guns. An Austrian army corps – for the comparison's sake – comprised two divisions with two–three brigades in each. Every brigade comprised three–four battalions, a few cavalry companies, and an artillery battery. This means the Bácska Corps had enough battalions, their strength was, however, merely around 7,500 and not 10,000 as that of Austrian corps.

Before his retreat to Northern Hungary General Görgei repeatedly reorganized his troops. Having completed the Perczel Corps, defeated at Mór on 30th December he split his army into four divisions of nearly equal sizes. The Commander-in-Chief created two-brigade divisions. Because of the heavy losses the previous Upper Danube Army was also considered as corps – the 7th Corps – according to the February battle order.

On 29th January General Dembinski was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the united army at the Tisza river. At the same time the General Staff Department of the Ministry of War put on agenda issues related with creating a unified army structure. Formations with various names were reorganized into corps and divisional structures although this measure indicated merely a unification of names at that time.

In accordance with the 12th February battle order the formation under the command of Colonel Klapka, stationed around Miskolc, was named 1st Corps, comprising the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd divisions. The former Perczel Corps under the command of Major General Répássy were renamed 2nd Corps and consisted of the 4th and 5th divisions. The 3rd Corps – with no commander appointed at that time – consisted of the 6th and 7th divisions. General Damjanich commanded the 4th Corps which was simultaneously the 8th division as well. General Dembinski was the Commander-in-Chief of the Görgei Corps too but due to the lack of information on its strength it was considered as one single division and was numbered 16th Division.

Besides the army at the river Tisza other units were also reorganized in similar way. Arad was under the siege of the 5th Corps' 9th and 10th Divisions. The 6th Corps, consisting of the 11th, 13th, 14th, 15th Divisions was under the command of General Bem. The 12th Reserve Division was in direct ministerial disposition while Komárom was defended by the 17th and 18th Divisions of the 8th Corps. The 19th Division was named "Flying Column" and the 20th Division consisted of the garrison and castle units.

On 8th March after the defeat at Kápolna General Antal Vetter was appointed a new Commander-in-Chief and a new battle order was introduced which was closer to reality. The 1st and 2nd Corps remained unchanged while the 3rd Corps was reorganized with the 6th and 8th Divisions. The 7th Division was fighting in Southern Hungary. The structure of the 5th and 6th Corps and the 12th Division remained unchanged. The 7th Corps were split into 3 divisions. The 19th Division was named "Máramaros Column" while the 8th Corps defending Komárom comprised three divisions.

On 18th March, in accordance with the accepted battle plan General Vetter's corps crossed the Tisza river but after a few days' maneuvering they had to return on the left bank of the river due to the bad weather conditions and insufficient reconnaissance. After this the Commander-in-Chief made a decision on further structural modifications.

He split the entire army into eight corps. The main army consisted of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 7th Corps. The 4th Corps were fighting in Southern Hungary, while the 6th were in Transylvania. The 5th Corps kept Arad under siege and the 8th Corps was defending Komárom. General Vetter substantially reorganized the main army too. In accordance with the late March battle order the 1st Corps comprised three infantry and one cavalry brigades while the 2nd Corps consisted of two infantry and one cavalry brigades. Divisions ceased to exist. The 3rd Corps, in which Colonel Wysocki's divisional commander position remained, consisted of three infantry brigades. Apart from these units a cavalry division was also created comprising three cavalry brigades under the command of Colonel Nagysándor and a Reserve Division under the command of Colonel Máriássy. The latter consisted of two brigades without artillery but had the four-battery main artillery reserve in its subordination.

The newly launched military campaign could not be led by General Vetter because of his ill health and Prime Minister Kossuth appointed General Görgei as Commander-in-Chief. General Görgei did not waste his time and modified the structure of the main army immediately after the launching the campaign. He re-established the divisional structure of the corps and disbanded the independent cavalry division. Since the 2nd Corps was the reserve – according to the battle plan – the Reserve Division became useless.

The siege of the Buda castle was the apex of the victorious Springtime Campaign. After taking the castle General Görgei restructured the Hungarian army for the sake of the renewal of the offensive. The corps were 10,000 strong consisting of two infantry and one cavalry divisions with one–three batteries in each. Brigades ceased to exist. An infantry division consisted of five battalions, a cavalry division comprised two cavalry regiments or eight cavalry groups. During the summer campaign this structure was valid but not fully executed.

From late June 1849 the Hungarian troops had to be concentrated in the Tisza–Maros region, according to the plan accepted by the government. This process began with setting up the Tisza army under the command of General Mór Perczel. It consisted of the North-East Hungary recruited 9th Corps, the Polish Legion, the 10th Corps comprising the two reserve divisions, the Kazinczy Division of Máramarossziget, and the Knézić Division, securing the Tisza fords.

Following the central organizational directives General Perczel restructured the forces under his command. He created four infantry divisions with two brigades in each, one independent infantry brigade, and a cavalry division consisting two brigades. The troops under the command of Colonel Kazinczy and General Knézić were named light divisions.

The Tisza Army arrived at Szeged on 29 July and reunited with the 4th Corps having fought in Southern Hungary, and the Szeged reserve Corps. General Perczel was relieved from service here and General Dembinski was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the united army. Since the Tisza army was left without a commander it was commanded by colonels Gal and Dessewffy, the first commanded the infantry the latter the cavalry. This was the army defeated later at Szőreg then at Temesvár.

The creation of the Hungarian Honvéd Army is perhaps the most remarkable and successful period in the military history of Hungary. It may be less spectacular than a victorious campaign or a won battle but its effects are amazing. The bulk of the job was done by a not very big group of officers who had hardly belonged to the second line of the Imperial army's officer corps. The highest positioned of them had been a regimental commander. A lot of them had been retired. Still, they were able to cope with the enormous tasks in spite of the unfavourable conditions. The relatively flawless separation from the Imperial and Royal army was successfully conducted. Since the officers knew the Austrian model of the army structure it is obvious that the new Hungarian army was set up to the same scheme. It is even more understandable if we take into consideration that in the beginning the Hungarian army was not to be fully independent and later only it became clear that cooperation with Austria was out of the question.

What made the organization extremely difficult were the lack of practice, inexperience, and the continuously changing political circumstances. However, it must be highlighted that the Hungarian political leadership provided the military leaders with extremely effective support during the period of organization. It was not infrequent that even some absolutely insignificant orders were signed by the Prime Minister.

It is also of importance and should be stressed that during the organization period the institutions and organs of the Imperial and Royal army were used and they were disbanded only when they became useless.

Several mistakes were also committed during the organization, of course, which often happened due to the unclear political situation. There was no real leader of organizing among the officers. The Minister of War did not prove to be unhesitant and energetic enough. Till the war broke out it had not pose serious problems later however it did. Central command could not prevail, the actions on the various theatres were not coordinated, not even a unified structure could be introduced. At that time that meant that politicians – especially Prime Minister Kossuth – could intervene in the course of actions that significantly impeded achieving military objectives.

From early 1849 a lot of things changed. The mistakes were recognized and the planned creating of military leadership received high priority. Establishing unified structures, appointing Commander-in-Chief were the milestones on this road. Not any more was the Austrian model an absolute “blueprint” the actual circumstances of the army’s actions became predominant. Personnel conditions and the quality and reliability of the troops were increasingly taken into consideration. The organization of the artillery is an outstanding example for that. There were few artillery officers and even fewer guns so that creating reserves here was not considered as important.

The results, however, were rather unsatisfactory first of all because of the unsuitable Commander-in-Chief. April marked a significant breakthrough in this area with a total harmony between the military and the political leadership. A new Commander-in-Chief was appointed who was able to turn his will into practice. A very efficient General Staff activity also enhanced this process.

That was the period when the real virtues of the young military leadership manifested themselves. Hungarian military leaders – army and corps commanders – possessed sufficient skills but of course lacked practice. That deficiency, however, produced a whole series of proper solutions. Several operations were carried out which were surprising and unexpected for the Austrian leadership. Vienna did not and could not expect such moves because the dry regulation-centered military exercises of the

long peace-time preceding the Hungarian War of Independence eliminated all similarly unorthodox ideas. Instead of precise preparations and careful deliberation the Hungarian High Command put emphasis on swiftness and surprise.

By the summer of 1849, however, the harmony between the military and political leaderships had been upset. The simultaneous Austrian and Russian offensives caused a shock which led to confusion and distrust, increasing predominance of political will, pushing military considerations into the background.

Creating the Central General Staff Bureau must be considered as a progressive idea too and it is most unfortunate that the system of its activity could not be properly elaborated.

The European public opinion paid special attention to the Hungarian War of Independence. Officers and soldiers meritoriously defending their country and the cause of Freedom and Progress were also in the focus of this attention. The names of the Hungarian generals became well known all over Europe and soon not only newspapers wrote about them but their plans and operations were analysed in military circles. Thus several of the operations were incorporated into course books of military schools as models of exemplary planning and execution.

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