

Judit Molnár

Crime and Punishment?

The Hungarian Gendarmerie during and after the Holocaust

Abstract

The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie was one of the most important state institutions between 1881 and 1945. Its task was to preserve law and order in the countryside, to prevent peasant uprisings and Socialist agitation in the villages. In 1944, it also became the task the gendarmerie to concentrate and deport the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. The contemporary documents so far researched as well as the papers of the people's court trials seem to clearly support the supposition that the gendarmerie, from the lowliest patrols to the gendarmerie district headquarters and to the detective subdivisions, readily took part in the collection and then the deportation of Jews. If deemed necessary, the trainees of the gendarmerie schools and training battalions assisted in the detection and collection.

The first question I attempt to answer in this paper is why Adolf Eichmann and his 'specialists' primarily trusted the Hungarian gendarmerie in the spring and summer of 1944, when the Jews in Hungary were deprived of their property, herded into ghettos and collection camps, and finally deported. This fundamental question thus relates to *the crime*, i.e. the deportation, and the role the gendarmerie played in the Holocaust. Second, I discuss the size of the gendarmerie, the number of those participating in the deportation, their connection to other agencies, above all the police and the administration, as well as their attitudes toward the persecution of Jews and to deportations. Third, I investigate whether the gendarmes were cruel, as most of the survivors claim, or, on the contrary, whether they helped the persecuted, whether they protested and perhaps refused to obey orders, as former gendarmes claim, and as some people in Hungary are still trying to have the public believe. Finally, I investigate what they knew, what they could have known about the destination of the deportation trains, and about the true, final end of the deportations.

My other fundamental question relates to *the punishment*, to the accountability. What was the extent of the gendarmerie's punishment, and how did it proceed? Was it a political show, or was their participation in the deportation the real reason for their punishment? How was evidence collected during the proceedings of the screening committees, the people's prosecutor and the people's court? Was torture resorted to, were the charges based on statements of witnesses, and/or were contemporary documents also attached to the indictments? The comparison to the criminal proceedings of other war criminals will be another important aspect of analysis.

The history of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, especially its role in the Holocaust, and the prosecution of gendarmes after the Second World War are issues much debated by historians in Hungary and abroad, by survivors, former gendarmes, and even more so by politicians.¹ According to one claim, “the great majority” of the gendarmes “were unlikely to have gone beyond their orders [...] brutality [on their part] must have been rare like white ravens” – so claimed József Parádi, a historian of law enforcement, in 1998.² Another claim, based on analysis of DEGOB protocols – *Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság* (National Committee Attending to Deportees): I am going to return to these protocols created in 1945/1946 later in some detail – and formulated by the historians Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági in 2004, states by contrast: “Having examined the material in the DEGOB protocols it would seem that during ghettoisation it was the gendarmes handling the Jews with benevolence and humanity that were ‘white ravens’. [...] The brutal procedure of the gendarmerie was not an isolated phenomenon, but a general and commonly known tendency.”³

This latter statement is supported by a letter dated 19 June 1944 which summed up the position of the Jews in Hungary in the following way, with special regard to the brutality of gendarmes: “In other countries the physical suffering of Jews started with the deportation, here [in Hungary] barbaric torture was introduced in the ghettos already, gendarmes submitting people to terrible pain – trying to get them to confess where they had hidden their alleged riches.”⁴ Catholic Bishop Endre Hamvas also described the brutality of the Hungarian authorities in the summer of 1944:

“The Prime Minister regards the news about the cruel and merciless procedures as exaggerated. But how can one without cruelty be dragged from one’s home [...] 70-75 people crowded into a boxcar, be transported for 4-5 days, locked, without food and water supply? And there was one more cruelty. [...] Jewish women were undressed and submitted to bodily search (*per inspectionem vaginae*) by midwives and doctors in the presence of men. What is that if not a perverted humiliation of female dignity and modesty?”⁵

One of the questions this paper focusses on is why it was the Hungarian gendarmerie that Adolf Eichmann and his ‘specialists’ primarily counted on in the spring and summer of 1944, when the Jews in Hungary were deprived of their property, herded into ghettos and collection camps, and finally deported. This fundamental question thus relates to *the crime*, the deportation, and the role the gendarmerie played in the Holocaust.

To this end, the size of the gendarmerie and the number of those participating in the deportation must be clarified, as well as their connection to other agencies, first

1 I discussed this issue and analysed the people’s court trials of gendarmes at the conferences on the sixtieth anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust in Budapest and Washington D.C. in 2004, see: Judit Molnár, *Gendarmes Before the People’s Court*, in: Judit Molnár (ed.), *The Holocaust in Hungary. A European Perspective*, Budapest 2005, 648-664.

2 Hiven, becsülettel, vitézül [Faithfully, Honourably, Valiantly]. A Documentary Film on the Gendarmerie, Duna Televízió, 6 December 1998. The discussion by ‘experts’ following the film revealed that the deportations had “proceeded peacefully”; that the gendarmes, “on the bases of Christian principles, did not really want to be cruel”; and that “[i]n those days there was order and discipline”.

3 www.degob.hu (14 March 2016).

4 The letter from an unknown source and written in German was delivered to Imre Tahy, temporary chargé d’affaires of Hungary in Bern. Published in German and in Hungarian in: Ilona Benoschofsky/Elek Karsai (ed.), *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen. Dokumentumok a magyarországi zsidóüldözés történetéhez* [Indictment of Nazism. Documents on the History of the Persecution of Jews in Hungary], Volume 2, Budapest 1960, 245-258, Here 252.

5 Esztergomi Prímási Levéltár [Esztergom Primate Archives], S 12/a III. Dosszié, papers of Jusztinián Serédi, see: Elek Karsai (ed.), *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* [Indictment of Nazism], Volume 3, Budapest 1967, 206-207.

of all the police, which was the other organ of public security, and the administration, and finally their attitudes to the persecution of Jews and to deportations. In other words, were the gendarmes cruel, as most of the survivors claim, or, on the contrary, did they help the persecuted, did they protest, perhaps refuse to obey orders, as former gendarmes claim, and some people in Hungary are still trying to have the public believe? Finally, what did they know, and what could they have known about the destination of the deportation trains, and about the true, final end of the deportations?

My other fundamental question relates to *the punishment*, to the accountability. What led to the punishment of gendarmes after the Second World War? What was the extent of their punishment, and how did it proceed? Was it a political show, or was their participation in the deportation the real reason for their punishment? How was evidence collected during the proceedings of the screening committees, the people's prosecutor and the people's court? Was torture resorted to, were the charges based on statements of witnesses, and/or were contemporary documents also attached to the indictments? The comparison to the criminal proceedings of other war criminals will be another important aspect of analysis.

Before turning to the results of my research, I will briefly survey the literature that has so far discussed the gendarmerie.

For decades, the Hungarian literature on the subject emphasised the brutality of the gendarmes against members of left-wing, Communist, and Social Democratic movements,⁶ as well as the role they played in 1944 in the deportation of Jews.⁷ Émigré gendarmes, on the other hand, claimed that the opposite was true: there was order in the country, people liked them, but the deportation of Jews is cast over the corps like a "shadow".⁸ Important monographs have been published on the functioning, structure, and activities of the gendarmerie by Csaba Csapó, Ferenc Kaiser, and Sándor Szakály since the change of the political regime in 1990.⁹ The Hungarian literature on the Holocaust – including works by László Karsai, Gábor Kádár, Zoltán Vági, myself and others – has also contributed publications of documents and partial treatments on the gendarmerie.¹⁰ Some scholars – such as Zoltán András Kovács and Tamás Kovács – have studied the activity of the gendarmerie during the Arrow

6 Ervin Hollós, *Rendőrség, csendőrség, VKF 2* [Vezérkari Főnökség 2/Chiefs of Military Staff 2] (Police, Gendarmerie, VKF 2), Budapest 1971.

7 Jenő Lévai, *Fekete könyv a magyar zsidóság szenvedéseiről* [Black Book on the Sufferings of Hungarian Jews], Budapest 1946; Jenő Lévai, *Szürke könyv a magyar zsidók megmentéséről* [Grey Book on the Rescue of Hungarian Jews], Budapest, Officina, 1946; Ilona Benoschofsky/Elek Karsai (ed.), *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* [Indictment against Nazism], Volume 1, Budapest 1958, Volume 2 Budapest 1960, and Elek Karsai (ed.), Volume 3 Budapest 1967.

8 Károly Kövendy, *Magyar királyi csendőrség. A csendőr békében, háborúban és emigrációban, 1881–1945* [Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie. The Gendarme in Peace, in War, and in Emigration, 1881–1945], Toronto 1973, 46.

9 Csaba Csapó, *A magyar királyi csendőrség története 1881–1914* [The History of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie 1881–1914] Pécs 1999; Sándor Szakály, *A magyar tábori csendőrség története 1938–1945* [The History of the Hungarian Military Police 1938–1945], Budapest 2000; Ferenc Kaiser, *A magyar királyi csendőrség története a két világháború között* [The History of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie between the Two World Wars], Pécs 2002.

10 László Karsai/Judit Molnár (ed.), *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per* [The Endre-Baky-Jaross Trial], Budapest 1994; Judit Molnár, *Zsidósors 1944-ben az V. (szegedi) csendőrkerületben* [Jewish Fate in Gendarmerie District V (Szeged) in 1944] Budapest 1995; Gábor Kádár/Zoltán Vági, *Rendvédelmi szervek és zsidók Magyarországon* [Law Enforcement Agencies and Jews in Hungary], in: *História* (1998) 8, 18–21. Judit Molnár (ed.), *Csendőrtiszt a Markóban. Ferenczy László csendőr alezredes a népbíróság előtt* [Gendarme Officer in the Markó. Gendarme Lieutenant-Colonel László Ferenczy before the People's Court], Budapest 2014. The monograph by Randolph Braham, which was also published in Hungarian, is also indispensable for the subject: Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary*, New York 2016.

Cross period.¹¹ Zoltán András Kovács also published a longer study on the situation of gendarmes after 1945.¹² Historians of law enforcement must be mentioned, too, in connection with the assessment of the gendarmerie, and one must not forget Magyar Királyi Csendőrség Bajtársi Közössége (The Hungarian Royal Gendarme Veterans Association), either. The latter launched their own website in 2005.¹³

Uncovering the facts is rather difficult since we have a very limited range of contemporary sources concerning the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie. Although the papers of the relevant departments in the Ministries of the Interior and Defence have survived in fragments, the papers of the gendarme districts down to the lowest gendarme posts have been lost and cannot be found either in the archives in Hungary or in the archives in the territories annexed by Hungary in 1938–1941, now in neighbouring countries.¹⁴ There are, however, documents of provincial public administrations (those of prefects, deputy-prefects, chief constables, and so on), which include papers in connection with the everyday activities of the gendarmerie (investigations, dispersing political rallies, and so on). In addition, we have secondary sources such as the documents of the people's court trials, the protocols of the DEGOB,¹⁵ memoirs and other statements, as well as contemporary printed materials such as *Csendőrségi Lapok* (Gendarmerie Papers) and *Csendőrségi Zsebkönyvek* (Gendarmerie Pocketbooks).

Without claiming completeness, I will focus briefly on the more important treatments that are regularly cited by other scholars.

The first to be picked out from the post-Second World War gendarme emigrant literature is the book by Gendarme Captain Károly Kövendi, published in 1973. The book is based mostly on recollections, proffering deeds of valour, heroic actions, and disclosures. All it has to say with regard to the ghettoisation and entrainment of Jews, who, he claimed, had been living unmolested in Hungary until May 1944, is that it was entrusted to the gendarmerie by the Hungarian government knowing that “not a hair on the Jews’ heads would be hurt!” In addition, he also claimed that “the highest commanders of the gendarmerie protested” about the job. According to Kövendi, 5,000 gendarmes were executed between 1945 and 1949, charged with war crimes and crimes against the people.¹⁶ This claim is absurd: the number of people executed in Hungary between 1945 and 1951 as a result of people's court sentences was altogether 227.

Gendarme Captain Béla Rektor made use of contemporary written documents and some of the documents published in Hungary in addition to recollections in his 1980 book.¹⁷ He conceded that in 1944 “unauthorised means” may have been resor-

11 Tamás Kovács, *A Nemzeti Számonkérő Különítmény* [The National Accounting Detachment], in: *Múltunk* (2006) 3, 71-100. Zoltán András Kovács, Ládai Istvánnak, a Szálasi-kormány belügyminisztériumi államtitkárának fogságban írott feljegyzései [Prison Notes of István Ládai, Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Interior in the Szálasi Cabinet], in: *Lymbus. Magyarológiai Forrásközlemények* [Hungarological Source Edition] (2008) 321-355.

12 Zoltán András Kovács, *Csendőrsors Magyarországon 1945 után* [The Fate of Gendarmes in Hungary after 1945], in: Imre Okváth (ed.), *Katonai perek a kommunista diktatúra időszakában 1945–1958* [Military Trials under the Communist Dictatorship, 1945–1958], Budapest 2001, 103-140.

13 www.csendor.com (13 March 2016).

14 It is possible that these papers have been destroyed, but then again they may still exist somewhere in archives in Hungary or Russia. The latter hypothesis is supported by the fact that in the course of my research I have sporadically come across original gendarmerie documents or true copies thereof among the papers of the people's court trials.

15 3,666 of the original protocols can be found in *Magyar Zsidó Levéltár* [Hungarian Jewish Archives] (MZSL), 3,515 of them are accessible online under www.degob.hu (14 March 2016). Some of the protocols have been translated into English: www.degob.org (14 March 2016).

16 Kövendi, *Magyar királyi csendőrség*, 125, 417.

17 Béla Rektor (1911–1989) was one of the instructor officers of the gendarme cadet battalion at Nagyvárad (today Oradea, Romania) in 1944.

ted to, but “firearms were not used once” during the ghettoisation of Jews.¹⁸ This claim can easily be disproved on the basis of the reports of Gendarme Lieutenant-Colonel László Ferenczy, who as the liaison officer of the gendarmerie with the German security police regularly summarised events in the various gendarmerie districts during the collection, entrainment, and deportation of the Jews in 1944.¹⁹ These reports, incidentally, are perhaps the most important contemporary sources for the role the gendarmerie played in the deportations. On 21 May 1944, Ferenczy reported from Munkács (Мукачів, Mukacsiv, Ukraine) that “the transports took place according to schedule, their departure and running to the border station always happened in impeccable order, totally devoid of disturbances. At Nyíregyháza and Munkács, there were successful uses of firearms on account of attempts to escape, one at each place.”²⁰ Rektor did not analyse the extent of the punishment, instead he mentioned examples of cases screened by political committees and brought to people’s court in Hungary after the war, and cases of prisoners in Soviet camps.²¹

Honorary Gendarme Zoltán Kőrössi, editor of the website of emigrant gendarmes, discussed the role of the gendarmerie during the Holocaust and their punishment after the war in a number of articles written jointly with his wife in 2010/2011.²² Kőrössi mentioned that he considered the Jews partially responsible for their own fate: “The complete co-operation of Jews undoubtedly contributed to the rapid execution of the deportations. [...] They did not put up physical resistance at all.”²³ Kőrössi repeatedly returned to this assertion in several of his publications.

According to him, “the gendarmerie protested against being involved in the deportations, [...] but they were forced to do it.”²⁴ He claimed that although perhaps a few gendarmes might have committed brutalities, all the gendarmes were persecuted after the Second World War.²⁵ According to Kőrössi, the gendarmerie “was mercilessly eliminated as a body which was ‘the enemy of the people’”, and later “this decision, made for political reasons, was justified by the gendarmerie having taken part in the deportations”.²⁶ He also stated “the tortures and murders inflicted by ÁVO [the State Security Department] cannot be compared to the alleged accusations and ‘brutalities’ that the gendarmes were charged with”.²⁷

Among historians of law enforcement, the works of József Parádi, quoted above, are of definitive importance. The textbook he edited, *A magyar rendvédelem törté-*

18 Béla Rektor, *A magyar királyi csendőrség oknyomozó története* [A Pragmatic History of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie], Cleveland 1980, 256-257.

19 László Ferenczy regularly sent his reports to the two under-secretaries of the interior, László Endre and László Baky, to Gábor Faragho, intendant of the gendarmerie, to Gyula Király, head of Dept. VII of the Ministry of the Interior, and to József Czigány, commander of the central detective department of the gendarmerie. The reports are published in: Molnár, *Csendőrtiszt* a Markóban, 280-317.

20 *Ibid.*, 294.

21 Rektor, *A magyar királyi csendőrség*, 298-306.

22 Zoltán Kőrössi was made an honorary gendarme in the 1970s and has been the central head of the Hungarian Royal Gendarme Veterans Association since 2008. In that capacity, he established and maintains www.csendor.com. His father, Zoltán vitéz Kőrössi (1912–1995) was a gendarme captain, see: <http://www.csendor.com/konyvtar/biografia/egyenek/Korossy> (13 March 2016).

23 Zoltán Kőrössi/Dr. Katalin Soltész nee Kőrössi, *A m. kir. csendőrség és a zsidóság* [The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie and the Jews] (January 2011), 3-5, <http://www.csendor.com/konyvtar/irasok/zsidóság/M.%20kir.%20csendorseg%20es%20zsidóság%20-%20Korossy.pdf> (13 March 2016).

24 *Ibid.*, 2.

25 The basic text by Zoltán Kőrössi/Dr. Katalin Soltész nee Kőrössi, *Magyar Királyi csendőrség Bajtársi Közösség* (MKCSBK) [The Hungarian Royal Gendarme Veterans Association] was written in November 2010, and was later updated in July 2012 and March 2015. 2-3, <http://www.csendor.com/site/MKCSBK-m.pdf> (13 March 2016).

26 Kőrössi/Soltész, *A m. kir. csendőrség és a zsidóság*, 6.

27 Kőrössi/Soltész, *Magyar Királyi csendőrség Bajtársi Közösség*, 3. The article repeats Kövendi’s claim that “the Communist regime murdered about 5,000 gendarmes”.

nete (The History of Policing in Hungary), discusses the deportation of Jews in a brief passage: “In the spring and summer of 1944 [...] the gendarmerie, that is to say some ten per cent of it, was given a sad job. [...] Following plans made by the Germans, they rounded up and escorted the Jewish population to the trains.”²⁸ We are not told, however, why he thought that just ten per cent of the gendarmerie took part in the entrainment, which according to his calculations meant 1,400 persons.²⁹ Furthermore, he completely omitted that most of the entrained Jews were deported to the extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where approximately eighty per cent of them were immediately murdered.

Parádi discussed all this in more detail in two articles he published in 2009.³⁰ Unfortunately, he did not use archival sources in either, all his references being to secondary literature and to texts of decrees. Knowledge of the latter, which consists mostly of printed sources accessible in libraries, is important of course, but these sources contain no information whatsoever on the method and course of the execution. According to Parádi, the deportation of Jews was a “neuralgic point” in the history of the gendarmerie. “There was a small minority that actively participated in the shameful activity of the deportations, others actively worked against it, and the majority merely disapproved, in silence.”³¹ To support his claim, he referred to one of my dissertations, which, however, does not include any statement of mine that would justify Parádi’s claim.³² Parádi only mentions my dissertation, without any reference to my statements and page numbers. According to Parádi, the gendarmerie was treated as a scapegoat organisation for political reasons, and the fact that the corps had taken part in the deportation of Jews was a pretext that came in handy.³³

However, it should not be forgotten that the gendarmerie performed not only the deportations in 1944, they also participated in the rounding up and deportation of nearly 18,000 ‘displaced’ Jews to Kőrösmező, most of whom were massacred a few weeks later at Kamenets-Podolski by a unit of Einsatzgruppe C. In January 1942, thousands of people including nearly a thousand Jews were killed in Délvidék (in and around Novi Sad, Southern Hungary, today Norther Serbia) by combined gendarmerie-military units. These events were mentioned as counts of indictments in several cases in the judicial proceedings after the Second World War.

Hungarian historiography has to date hardly discussed the reckoning that the gendarmerie had to face after the war. The article of Zoltán András Kovács entitled *The Fortune of Gendarmes in Hungary after 1945* draws on an extensive amount of source material. His mistakes in the indication of sources notwithstanding, it is the best study so far. He declared that the decree disbanding the gendarmerie in 1945 pronounced

28 József Parádi (editor-in-chief), *A magyar rendvédelem története* [The History of Hungarian Law Enforcement], Budapest 1996, 118.

29 *Ibid.*, 104, 118.

30 József Parádi, *A csendőrség magyarországi története* [The History of the Gendarmerie in Hungary], in: *Rendvédelem-történeti Füzetek* [Notes on the History of the Law Enforcement] (2009) 16/19, 64-88; József Parádi, *Tények és érzelmek egy hajdani magyar rendvédelmi testület története kapcsán* [Facts and Feelings Regarding the History of a Hungarian Law Enforcement Body of Late], in: *Rendvédelem-történeti Füzetek* [Notes on the History of the Law Enforcement] (2009) 17/20, 93-99.

31 Parádi, *A csendőrség magyarországi története*, 77-78. Parádi puts it similarly in his 2012 book: József Parádi, *A Magyar Királyi Csendőrség. Az első magyar polgári, központosított, közbiztonsági őrtestület 1881-1945* [The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie. The First Hungarian Middle-Class, Centralised Guarding Body of Public Safety 1881-1945], Budapest 2012, 107-108.

32 The work cited by Parádi was Judit Molnár, *Zsidósors 1944-ben az V. (szegedi) csendőrkerületben* [The Jewish Fate in Gendarmerie District V (Szeged) in 1944], Cand. Diss., Szeged 1995. I did discuss the role of the gendarmerie in my work, which was published by Cserépfalvi Kiadó, but my conclusions were far removed from those drawn by Parádi.

33 Parádi, *A csendőrség magyarországi története*, 79; Parádi, *A Magyar Királyi Csendőrség*, 106.

corporate responsibility. At the same time, he argued that the main reason for the unpopularity of the gendarmerie was – thanks to political propaganda – the deportation, although merely ten per cent of the personnel took part therein.³⁴ In other words, he accepted and reproduced the argument and data of the police history textbook.

László Karsai and I edited the people's court trial documents of the 'deporting trio', László Endre and László Baký, both Secretaries of State in the Ministry of the Interior, and Andor Jaross, Minister of the Interior,³⁵ as well as those of Prime Minister Döme Sztójay and his accomplices,³⁶ but in these documentary volumes we only tangentially discussed the responsibility of the gendarmerie. A few articles on the Hungarian Holocaust cover the responsibility of individual gendarmes, but these works do not provide methodical, comprehensive analysis.³⁷ I dedicated a short chapter in my book *Zsidósors 1944-ben az V. (szegedi) csendőrkerületben* (The Jewish Fate in Gendarmerie District V [Szeged] in 1944) to discussing the problem of responsibility, and I also discussed the punishment of the gendarme officers in gendarmerie district V (Szeged).³⁸ In the edited volume from the conference on the sixtieth anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust, I discussed the judicial proceedings against the commanders of the various gendarmerie districts after the Second World War.³⁹ Last but not least, I edited the reports and the people's court trial papers of Gendarme Lieutenant-Colonel László Ferenczy in 2014.⁴⁰

The above would indicate that neither the role played by the gendarmerie in the Holocaust nor the holding to account of gendarmes after the war has been methodically examined to this day. Whatever has been published on the subject is either prejudiced or erroneous, discusses the matter merely in passing, or contains partial research results only. The present paper is intended to be a first step toward a comprehensive analysis.

* * *

Let us see after all this the first fundamental problem: *the crime*.

Due to the fragmentary nature of the extant papers of the gendarmerie it is impossible to determine today exactly how many gendarmes were in service in 1944, and how many actually took part in the deportation of Jews. It should be clear from the literature on the subject discussed above that some people try to diminish the responsibility of the gendarmerie by claiming, without any reference to sources, that no more than a fraction of the gendarmerie took part in the ghettoisation and deportation. High-ranking gendarme officers remembered differently in the statements they made at the people's court trials. The figures varied between 16,000 and 32,000.⁴¹

34 Kovács, *Csendőrsors*, 104.

35 Karsai/Molnár (ed.), *Az Endre-Baký-Jaross per*.

36 László Karsai/Judit Molnár (ed.), *A magyar Quisling-kormány. Sztójay Döme és társai a népbíróság előtt* [The Hungarian Quisling Government. Döme Sztójay and his Accomplices before the People's Court], Budapest 1956, 2004.

37 László Csösz, "Keresztény polgári érdekek sérelme nélkül...". Gettósítás Szolnokon 1944-ben ["Without Damage to Christian Middle-class Values...". Ghettoisation in Szolnok in 1944], in: Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *Tanulmányok a holokausztról II* [Papers on the Holocaust II], Budapest 2002, 244; Izabella Sulyok, "A 'zsidókérdés' Szombathelyen a népbírósági perek tükrében [The 'Jewish Question' in Szombathely in the Mirror of the People's Court Trials], in: Ágnes Tamás (ed.), *Mozaikok a magyar történelemből* [Mosaics from Hungarian History], Szeged 2009, 82.

38 Molnár, *Zsidósors 1944-ben*, 179-183.

39 Molnár, *Gendarmes Before the People's Court*, 648-664.

40 Molnár, *Csendőrtiszt a Markóban*.

41 See for example Budapest Főváros Levéltára [Budapest City Archives, hereafter BFL], B. 18.167/1949, People's Court Trial of József Czigány.

Superintendent Gábor Faragho of the Gendarmerie was not consistent either.⁴² On 21 June 1944 at the meeting of the Council of Ministers, he spoke of 20,000 gendarmes, and in a highly interesting context, too: “If we consider that we have deported more than 400,000 Jews for the purpose of labour service and resettlement, then we must dismiss as irrelevant that complaints have been filed against some of the 20,000 Hungarian gendarmes.”⁴³

The Hungarian literature on the subject is not in agreement on the size of the personnel. The textbook of police history by Parádi assumes that 14,000 is the correct number.⁴⁴ However, the same József Parádi counted 22,000 in 2009, and wrote about 20,000 to 22,000 persons in 2012.⁴⁵ Ferenc Kaiser estimated the force at 16,000.⁴⁶ The scholarly literature on the Holocaust has accepted the 20,000 that Faragho specified in 1944. We do know for certain that the Treaty of Trianon allowed a 12,000 men-strong gendarmerie within the borders specified in the treaty.⁴⁷ The figures of the national budgets show that successive governments in Hungary maintained that size until 1939, when the Minister of the Interior planned extra expenditure for public safety services, saying “the number of gendarmerie personnel had to be increased”.⁴⁸ For the year 1942, they calculated for 16,000 men, and planned for 17,224 men for 1944. Since National Discharge did not take place that year, we do not have a precise final figure. However, the plan of the budget makes it clear that – based on the authorisation of the Defence Act (Act II. 1939, §31) – a gendarmerie battalion was set up of rank and file “for the purposes of creating a gendarmerie reserve, in addition to performing policing activities”, and new patrols were also created.⁴⁹ This supports the hypothesis that the actual strength of the gendarmerie was indeed around 20,000, as Faragho stated at the meeting of the Council of Ministers in June 1944.

42 General Gábor Faragho (1890–1953), military attaché in Moscow from 1 July 1940 to 22 June 1941, intendant of the gendarmerie from November 1942 to October 1944, then Minister of Public Supplies of the Provisional National Government from 23 December 1944 to 21 July 1945. According to Miklós Mester, Chief of the Regent’s Cabinet Office Gyula Ambrózy mentioned Faragho in June 1944 as the third member of the deporting triad on the Hungarian side. Nevertheless, not only did Faragho avoid being taken to task, but as a member of the Provisional National Government, he took part in finally formulating the text of the decree that dissolved the gendarmerie. In the last years of his life, he was forcibly relocated to the countryside, but was allowed to live on his own farm because, at least according to one person, Mátyás Rákosi “would not dare to touch Faragho because he knew Stalin liked him and kept track of him”. According to Mester, Faragho had made himself popular in Moscow by “transporting great quantities of Kecskemét apricot brandy [to Moscow] in characteristic Hungarian bottles”, see: Miklós Mester, *Arcképek két tragikus kor árnyékában. Visszapillantás a katasztrofális magyarországi 1944. esztendőre, részint annak előzményeire és közvetlen következményeire is, 27 év távlatából* [Portraits in the Shadow of Two Tragic Eras. Looking back on the Disastrous Year of 1944 in Hungary, and partly on its Precedents and Direct Consequences from the Distance of 27 Years], edited by István Kollega Tarsoly, endnotes by Tamás Kovács, Budapest 2012, 76, 127, 564–565.

43 Karsai/Molnár, *A magyar Quisling-kormány*, 755. At the trial of József Czigány, Faragho, while confirming that the Hungarian gendarmerie had played a primary role in the deportation of Hungarian Jews, said their strength had been 16,000 “only”. BFL, B. 18.167/1949. 96.

44 Parádi, *A magyar rendvédelem története*, 104.

45 Parádi, *A csendőrség magyarországi története*, 77; József Parádi, *A XIX-XX. századi magyar rendszerváltozások és a csendőrség* [Hungarian Regime Changes in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries and the Gendarmerie], in: *Rendvédelem-történeti Füzetek* (2012) 22/25, 106. Parádi, *A Magyar Királyi Csendőrség*, 63, 66, 139.

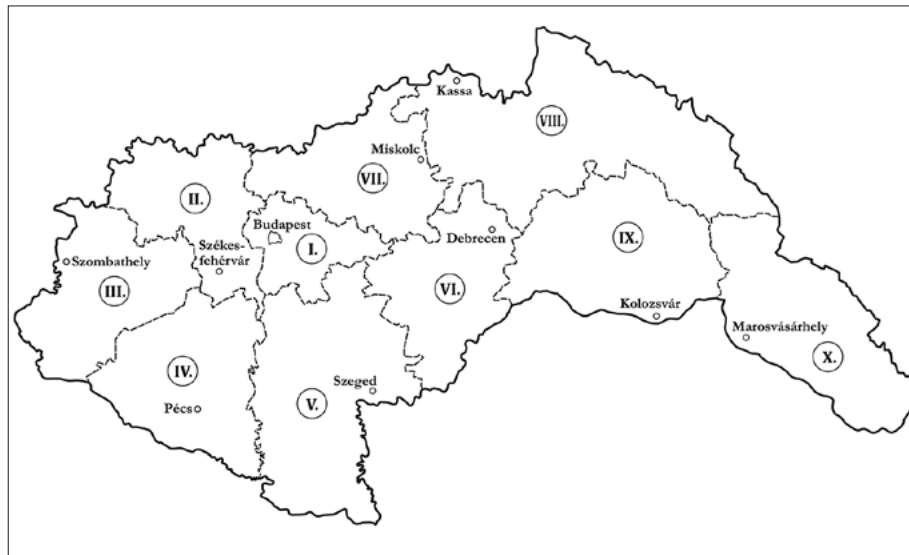
46 Kaiser, *A magyar királyi csendőrség története*, 30, 55, 115.

47 The total number (12,000) of the gendarmerie could not have included more than 600 officers. Act VII/1922 on establishing the strength, methods of supplementing, and arming the Royal Hungarian State Police and the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7518> (29 June 2016). It is worth mentioning that also in the years prior to the First World War, approximately 12,000 gendarmes served in Hungary, except that in those years the area of the country was 283,000 square kilometres, while after the Treaty of Trianon it was 93,000 only.

48 State budget for the 1939–1940 accounting period from 1 July 1939 to 31 December 1940, http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/AllamiKoltsegvetes_1939-1940/?pg=328&layout=s&query=SZO%3D (30 June 2016).

49 State budget for the year 1944, see: http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/AllamiKoltsegvetes_1944/?pg=100&layout=s&query=SZO%3D (30 June 2016).

With regard to the structure of the gendarmerie, the basic difference to the police was that while the latter was supervised by the Ministry of the Interior, the gendarmerie was under dual control, namely of both the Ministries of the Interior and Defence. From its beginnings in 1881, the gendarmerie was a military-style of public security organisation. From November 1942, its highest-ranking military commanding officer, the Superintendent of the Gendarmerie, was Lieutenant-General Gábor Faragho. The division of gendarmerie districts followed the district division of the military. There were seven gendarmerie districts within the borders defined by Trianon, and after the territorial expansions of 1938–1941, this number grew to ten. Each gendarmerie district covered three or four full counties and parts of two or three other counties. The gendarmerie district headquarters consisted of gendarmerie battalions, which were in turn divided into companies, platoons, and patrols. In practice, a gendarmerie patrol was responsible for law and order in two to four villages. In 1930, the Central Detective Division was established, and every gendarmerie district formed their own detective subdivisions. In addition, reinforcements and new recruits were trained in gendarmerie schools and training battalions.



Gendarmerie Districts in Hungary, 1944. © DIMAP, 2017.

With regard to territorial jurisdiction, while the police force performed their duties concerning public safety in the capital, Budapest, and in the inner city areas of cities/towns – in 1944 there were altogether 91 város, cities or towns, in Hungary. The rest of the territory of the country fell under the jurisdiction of the gendarmerie; these included town/city peripheries, the 6,550 villages (in 1944), and thousands of so-called inhabited peripheral places. According to the figures of the 1941 census, approximately three fourths of the population of the country lived in the latter. The number of Jews in this year – including all *Orthodox*, *Neolog*, and *Status Quo* – was 725,000, and there were close to 62,000 ‘Jews of Christian faith’. Of all these people, approximately 300,000 (37.4 per cent) lived in villages. However, as we shall see, the gendarmerie assisted the police force in the towns when it came to collecting and deporting Jews. The confidential order of the Ministry of the Interior issued after the German occupation for the collection of Jews expressly instructed the gendarmerie to support the police, if necessary, in this task.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Benoschofsky/Karsai (ed.), *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen*, Volume 1, 125-126.

Finally, one more important difference between these two organisations of public safety must be mentioned: The police was both a policing authority and policing agency, meaning that it was within the jurisdiction of a city police commissioner to issue decrees and resolutions. The gendarmerie, unlike the police, was only a policing agency, i.e. merely an enforcement branch. On the lower level, they received their orders from the leaders of the subordinate districts, from the chief constables, on a higher level from the sub-prefects of counties, and on the highest level from the Minister of the Interior or the relevant Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior. Thus, researching the documents of provincial administrations is highly relevant for a knowledge of the operation of the gendarmerie, even if the contemporary documents are fragmentary in that respect.

It follows from the above that if Eichmann wanted to set a new deportation record, which he did, he needed the gendarmerie, the police force, the public administration, and other public servants like teachers, doctors, railway personnel, in order to perform the ‘dejewification’ of Hungary. In any case, it was not a coincidence that first and foremost he relied on the militarily disciplined gendarmerie, for the larger part of the country was policed by them. They assisted the police in the remaining places, in the towns, in the deprivation, collection, and deportation of Jews. As a policing agency organised along military lines, its members did not ask questions, but executed orders: They conducted body searches, made lists of *corpus delicti* of Jewish valuables, herded Jews into brick factories and pigsties, and then crammed seventy, eighty, or ninety people at a time into grain waggons or cattle cars. They did all this in a disciplined manner, firmly, mercilessly, and extremely fast. Eichmann, with the two State Secretaries of the Ministry of the Interior, László Endre and László Baký, as well as with Gendarme Lieutenant-Colonel László Ferenczy, worked out the schedule of “dejewification”, which in the end divided the ten gendarmerie districts into six deportation zones following the gendarmerie district division.



The Ghettoisation and Deportation of the Jews from the Hungarian Countryside
April-July 1944. © DIMAP,2017.

(Click here for an enlarged version of the map)

So far, the contemporary documents as well as the people's court trials clearly support the assumption that the gendarmerie, from the lowliest patrols to the district headquarters and the detective subdivisions readily took part in the collection and then the deportation of Jews. If deemed necessary, the cadets of the gendarmerie schools and training battalions assisted in the detection and collection. Thus, it was not a "small minority," a mere ten per cent of the gendarmerie that took part in the deportations. Naturally, further research will have to establish how many individuals from the staff of the various patrols, companies, and so forth in fact executed the anti-Jewish orders, and in what manner. However, it must be clearly stated that the complete force was placed at disposal for the anti-Jewish operation.

The protocols of the DEGOB compiled in 1945/1946 are regarded as one of the basic sources for this subject. The protocols contain the statements of about 5,000 Holocaust survivors. These are mostly testimonies made individually, but 'group' depositions were also taken. Of the 3,666 protocols, 3,515 are accessible on the website.⁵¹ In approximately every third document, that is to say, in 1,246 testimonies, the gendarmes are mentioned by the survivors. A significant number of the protocols begin with events that took place after departure from Hungary, and thus the gendarmes are not mentioned in these statements. In many cases, the survivors speak in general about the cruelties that occurred during ghettoisation in Hungary, but they do not say whether the persons inflicting them were policemen, gendarmes, doctors, administrative officials, or German guards. I have found altogether only 22 protocols in which the survivors mention that there were decent gendarmes, too. That is merely 0.6 per cent of all the statements, and 1.8 per cent of the protocols that mention gendarmes. I therefore regard these as the rare ones, the 'white ravens'. If we add the gendarmes who extended help not out of altruism, but gave the victims water and food in exchange for money or valuables, then we have forty more documents that mention good gendarmes, at least "under the circumstances". These are the 'grey ravens'.

Of the 22 documents mentioning gendarmes helping selflessly, eight say in general that some of the gendarmes were decent and fair. In one of these cases it meant that the gendarmes "did not chase away the people trying to help".⁵² In another case, the gendarme was not "brutal" because the Jewish person had previously been his physician.⁵³ In three further cases, the gendarmes smuggled food into the camp.⁵⁴ One of the latter also smuggled out a letter.⁵⁵ In the period following the Arrow Cross takeover on 15 October 1944, there were two cases in which a gendarme officer prevented an execution and another in which a gendarme refused to perform an execution saying "he was not going to shoot a tied up, helpless man".⁵⁶ In the Arrow Cross times, too, there were gendarmes who threw snow into the boxcars, thus providing the deportees with water.⁵⁷ In two cases, high-ranking gendarme officers accepted documents of exemption and attempted to keep Jews from being deported.⁵⁸ The documents mention only three gendarme officers who, while obeying orders, ac-

51 See www.degob.hu (14 March 2016)

52 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 3275: "As they were taking us to the railway cars three kilometres away, unknown persons on the way also gave us food, and the gendarmes escorting us behaved relatively decently, as they did not drive away the donors."

53 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 3554.

54 MZSL, DEGOB Protocols 81, 151, 3543.

55 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 3543.

56 MZSL, DEGOB Protocols 2347, 3261.

57 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 3051.

58 MZSL, DEGOB Protocols 3015, 3605.

tively assisted several people in escaping from the ghetto, or from the death marches after the Arrow Cross takeover.⁵⁹

One case study is László Endre: commander of the gendarme station at Csillaghegy – and namesake of, but not related to the infamous State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior – Endre advised a number of people to escape and saved the lives of nearly 400 people, including Jews, Polish refugees, and Social Democratic politicians.⁶⁰ In November 1945, he said that he had disobeyed the law and his superiors because, as the father of three children, he had tried to imagine how the persecuted felt, and how he would feel if his children were treated so cruelly.⁶¹ Most of the 1,246 protocols that mention gendarmes, however, relate the horrors of being robbed, undergoing body searches, being tortured, collected, entrained, and deported. A few samples: “they drove us like horses”.⁶² “They took us to the station at Ilosva, beat us up on the way, and put us into wagons as we were, covered with blood.”⁶³ “Women had electricity conducted into their wombs” in Nagyvárad.⁶⁴ “Both the Germans and the gendarmes, the latter even more, raped young girls, who then had to be taken to hospital.”⁶⁵ In Monor, “[t]he gendarmes interrogated with electricity, they gathered especially the rich, respectable types, beat them up, searching for jewels and money”.⁶⁶

Even without these interrogations, can herding and cramming thousands of people into brick-drying sheds (Beregszász, Szeged, Monor, and Budakalász), industrial plants (Kecskemét and Szolnok), mills (Barcs, Szabadka, and Dunapentele), pigsties (Szeged), cowsheds (Szandapuszta), stables (Pécs), and so on be called humane treatment? Is there a humane way of locking seventy or eighty people up in a wagon, with two buckets, one for water, the other for waste, until they arrive at an extermination camp? It was the gendarmes who rounded people up into the collecting camps, who guarded these camps, and who crammed people into the wagons.

Cruelty is not an accident.⁶⁷ For what was the ‘message’ that the decrees issued by the government of Döme Sztójay communicated?⁶⁸ They stated as follows:

“The Royal Hungarian Government will soon cleanse the country of Jews.”⁶⁹ This cleansing was to be 100 per cent, meaning that all Jews without regard to sex and age would have to be taken to collection camps. The task of rounding them up was entrusted to the police and the gendarmerie. The latter would help the police in the cities “if necessary”. “Take money and valuables into safe-keeping.” The Jews were

59 MZSL, DEGOB Protocols 987, 1765, 3496, 3642.

60 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 3496.

61 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 3642.

62 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 1.

63 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 1284.

64 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 5.

65 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 2824.

66 MZSL, DEGOB Protocol 3322.

67 It should be noted that the cruelty of the gendarmerie had been criticised earlier by the Germans, too. In 1936, during a visit to Berlin, Interior Minister Miklós Kozma responded to charges by the Germans concerning the activity of the gendarmerie, namely that gendarmes were adopting extremely brutal measures against German minorities in Hungary, in the following way: “I have no problem admitting that gendarmes in Hungary hit and slap more often than in the West. That’s the way it is with us, however, they do not hit the German minorities, but those slapped in the face include minorities, too. The indignation would be righteous if Hungarians were not hit and slapped, too, but believe me, smacks in the face by Hungarian gendarmes are meted out without regard to race and religion, depending purely on the cases themselves.” Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives] (MNL), K 429, Diary of Miklós Kozma, 1936.

68 Döme Sztójay (1883–1946) Prime Minister from March 22 to August 22, 1944.

69 So-called collecting camp decree, 7 April 1944, 6163/1944 BM [Minister of the Interior] VII. res. See Benoschofsky/Karsai (ed.), *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen*, Volume 1, 124–127.

transported as “prisoners”, and the rounding up was carried out according to gendarmerie districts across the whole country.⁷⁰

What was expected of the executors, the gendarmes?

Firm, smooth and quick execution, “relentless severity”, as the commander of gendarmerie district IV (Pécs) wrote.⁷¹ They should perform “other service activities” only if it was vitally urgent, they were to engage exclusively in the ghettoisation of Jews, moving them to collection camps. The commander of gendarmerie district V (Szeged) also issued orders.⁷² Operations always commenced at dawn, usually at five o’clock. Valuables, including devotional objects if made of precious metal, were to be confiscated as ‘corpus delicti’.⁷³ Most of the gendarmes carried out the orders vigorously, often using cruel torture, beating Jews until they confessed where they had hidden their valuables. There were very few whose conscience made them try to help the persecuted. And finally there were those who helped Jews for money or some other form of compensation.

Assessing the activities of Reserve Police Battalion 101, Christopher Browning came to a similar conclusion in his book *Ordinary Men*, based on the experiment Philip Zimbardo had run in Stanford Prison. Zimbardo had divided a test group into guards and prisoners and placed them in a simulated prison. On the basis of their behaviour, he divided the guards into three groups. Browning’s research results harmonised with Zimbardo’s conclusions:

“Zimbardo’s spectrum of guards bears an uncanny resemblance to the groupings that emerged within Reserve Police Battalion 101: a nucleus of increasingly enthusiastic killers who volunteered for the firing squads and ‘Jew hunts’; a larger group of policemen who performed as shooters and ghetto clearers when assigned but who did not seek opportunities to kill (and in some cases refrained from killing, contrary to standing orders, when no one was monitoring their actions); and a small group (less than 20 per cent) of refusers and evaders.”⁷⁴

The gendarmerie also included enthusiastic, explicitly cruel gendarmes. The majority, as research so far has revealed, obeyed and carried out decrees and orders strictly but did not exceed them. Finally, an extremely small group, a mere fraction of three to four per cent of gendarmes helped Jews out of compassion or for money. This ratio is far below Browning’s 20 per cent. Most of the gendarmes certainly did not know about the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Naturally, however, just as the persecuted received the news from forced military labourers or soldiers coming home from the front on leave, from refugees who had fled to Hungary, or from reading between the lines in newspapers, that Jews were being massacred by Nazi Germany, gendarmes could similarly have acquired knowledge of these horrors. It is a fact, in any case, that they did not expect the unfortunate women, children, and old people they ‘escorted’ to Kassa (Košice, Slovakia) and there handed over to the Germans ever to return. In more than one place, gendarme officers submitted claims for Jewish apartments and houses for themselves and their families, or for accommodating gendarme guardhouses. Gábor Faragho, on the other hand, had heard about the gas

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára [Historical Archives of the State Security Services, hereafter ABTL], V-146.147, People’s Court Trial of László Hajnácskóy.

⁷² Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Csongrád Megyei Levéltára [Hungarian National Archives – Archives of Csongrád County] (MNL – CsML), Nb. 35/1945, People’s Court Trial of Béla Tóth.

⁷³ MNL – CsML, Nb. 1253/1945, People’s Court Trial of Andor Keresztes.

⁷⁴ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, London 2001, 168.

chambers in June 1944, yet he did not propose to have the deportations stopped at the meeting of the Council of Ministers on June 21. At the same time, he even underplayed the cruelty of the gendarmerie, regarding it as “irrelevant” that “complaints have been filed against some of the 20,000 Hungarian gendarmes”.⁷⁵ László Ferenczy also received the so-called Auschwitz Protocols in mid-June, which described precisely what was happening to those deported to Auschwitz. Yet it was only early in July that he reported to Prime Minister Döme Sztójay, and then to Regent Miklós Horthy, that the contents of the protocols should be checked.⁷⁶

Horthy already heard about the brutalities of the gendarmes at the end of May. In his letter to Prime Minister Sztójay in early June 1944, he wrote: “[...] lately I have received information that in that field [that of the ‘solution of the Jewish question’], in several respects, much more has happened here than with the Germans themselves, and that in such brutal, indeed, sometimes inhumane manner that even the Germans themselves would not resort to carrying out these measures.”⁷⁷ Although he mentioned more than once that the gendarmerie should not be involved, it took him another month before he made up his mind to suspend the deportations on 6 July. By that time, however, more than 400,000 people had been deported.

And now to the second fundamental problem: *the punishment*.

In the first months of 1945, according to public administration documents, leaders in the provinces were not thinking about terminating the gendarmerie as an organisation. In several places, indeed, steps were taken to reorganise it under other names, such as citizens’ guard, national guard, or peace-keeping guard.⁷⁸

A government decree published on 10 May 1945, however, “establishe[d] the responsibility of the gendarmerie as a body, terminate[d] its institution, and dissolve[d] its organisation”.⁷⁹ Furthermore, gendarmes’ pensions were terminated, except in cases in which the person involved was declared ‘clean’ or ‘cleared’.⁸⁰ Gendarmes were not covered by general screening procedures, but at their own request they could be subjected to a special screening procedure. The importance of being declared ‘clean’ was important for gendarmes because it was a requirement if they wanted jobs in their own profession, meaning with the police force.

This decree went through months of preparation, between January and May. Some, including Gábor Faragho, former Superintendent of the Gendarmerie, then Minister of Public Supplies, spoke up against the establishment of collective responsibility. Therefore, the original text was modified to include “the responsibility of the

75 Karsai/Molnár, *A magyar Quisling-kormány*, 755.

76 Molnár, *Csendőrtiszt a Markóban*, 31–34, 143, 206, 302–309.

77 Miklós Szinai/László Szücs (ed.), *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* [The Confidential Papers of Miklós Horthy], Budapest 1963, 451. Edmund Veessenmayer, the plenipotentiary commissioner, remarked in his telegram to Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop on 21 June 1944 that “the Regent sent a secret letter to Sztójay in which he held the government responsible for the harsh handling of the Jewish question”. György Ránki/Ervin Pamlényi/Loránt Tilkovszky/Gyula Juhász (ed.), *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról 1933–1944* [Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary. German Diplomatic Papers on Hungary, 1933–1944], Budapest 1968, 870.

78 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Somogy Megyei Levéltára (Kaposvár) [Hungarian National Archives – Archives of Somogy County] (MNL – SML), 273/1945, 804/1945, papers of the district clerk, Szigetvár district.

79 No. 1690/1945. M. E. in: *Magyar Közlöny*, 26, 10 May 1945, 3–4. According to the first passage in paragraph 1 of the decree, the gendarmerie “served the anti-people governments in the past with unconditional obedience, strove to annihilate Hungarian democratic movements by merciless means, and committed innumerable acts of violence against Hungarian peasants and Hungarian workers”.

80 Widows or orphans of gendarmes were only entitled to benefits, and pensions if the gendarme in question had died prior to 1 September 1939, or if he had died after 1 September 1939, but he was cleared by the screening committee.

gendarmerie as a body”.⁸¹ According to the original version of the decree, gendarmes would have been obliged “to report to undergo the screening procedure” with the screening committee operating at the place of their former service. According to the final version of the text, however, “they do *not* [emphasis, J.M.] fall under general screening proceedings”. It followed from this change that the provision was also omitted that if a gendarme did not report before a screening committee by 1 June 1945, he could be interned for at least six months if caught.⁸² This, naturally, did not mean that gendarmes were not interned already before the screening proceedings.

Only one committee for screening gendarmes was set up, in Budapest. Simultaneously, as papers of the public administration indicate, bills were posted in the countryside at the places of residence of the persons concerned for anyone “with favourable or unfavourable information” on them to report to the authorities.⁸³ The literature on the subject offers differing figures, if at all, when it comes to the number of gendarmes in Hungary after the Second World War, of their losses in the war, of how many of them were “cleared”, how many were convicted, and the severity of their sentences. The former gendarme officers in emigration (Kövendy and Rektor) spoke of war losses of over fifty per cent: 10,000-11,000 people. In one of his articles on the website www.csendor.com, Kőrössy mentioned a loss of 4,000, and in another of 10,000.⁸⁴ According to the summary of the Államvédelmi Hatóság, the State Security Authority (ÁVH), of 15 May 1950, the number of former gendarmes in Hungary was at that time 15,828.⁸⁵ If we accept that in 1944 the gendarmerie was approximately 20,000 strong, then the loss it suffered was about 4,000, this number also including those captured by the Red Army, those who had not returned, as well as those who had died between 1945 and May 1950.

The numbers of those subjected to screening proceedings and those ‘cleared’ also fluctuate in the literature. As to the latter, the figures range between 211 and 271. Zoltán András Kovács gave more detailed figures broken down over the years between 1945 and 1948, but without indicating his source(s). He stated that “the committee screening gendarmes examined the cases of 2,252 former gendarmes during its forty months of activity (until 31 October 1948), and it cleared only 271”, a proportion of twelve per cent.⁸⁶

Annual Activity of the Committee Screening Gendarmes (1945–1948)⁸⁷

Year	1945	1946	1947	1948	Total
Persons Screened	658	491	687	416	2,252
Persons Found ‘Clean’	64	169	27	11	271

81 László Szűcs (ed.), Dálnoki Miklós Béla kormányának (Ideiglenes Nemzeti Kormány) minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvei 1944. december 23.-1945. november 15. [Meetings of the Cabinet of Miklós Béla Dálnoki (Provisional National Government), 23 December 1944-15 November 1945], Volume A, Budapest 1997, 332, 336, 359, 365-367.

82 Ibid 366; Magyar Közlöny [Official Gazette], 26, 10 May 1945, 3-4.

83 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Baranya Megyei Levéltára [Hungarian National Archives – Archives of Baranya County] (MNL – BML), 849/1946, Pécs város polgármesterének iratai [Papers of the Mayor of Pécs].

84 Kőrössy/Soltész, A m. kir. csendőrség története [History of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie], 29, 55. note, <http://www.csendor.com/site/tortenelem-m.pdf> (30 June 2016). Kőrössy/Soltész, Magyar Királyi csendőr Bajtársi Közösség, 3. In the latter they wrote the following: “360 officers and 10,000 men of the gendarmerie survived the war. The Communist regime exterminated some 5,000 gendarmes. Approximately 3,000 were sent to Soviet forced labour camps, and some 1,500 found their way to the West.”

85 ÁBTL, A-618.

86 Kovács, Csendőrsors, 124. According to Kovács, the committee screening gendarmes had its first meeting on 9 June 1945, and ceased functioning on 31 October 1948 in accordance with decree No.11200/1948. M.E.

87 Kovács, Csendőrsors, 124.

The findings of my own research does not support Kovács's data in more than a few cases. It must be noted that the documents of the committee screening gendarmes have not survived. On the other hand, a significant part of their index books, namely those from between 1945 and 1948, can be found in the Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, the Historical Archive of the State Security Services. So far, I have not been able to find the volumes for 1949 and 1950. However, contrary to Kovács' claim, this screening committee did not cease to exist in October 1948.

The notices posted in Magyar Közlöny (Official Gazette) by the committee for screening gendarmes are also accessible in libraries and archives. The notices issued by the chairman of the committee continuously published who came under screening proceeding and when, and the names of those declared 'clean'. If anyone came up before the people's court after the screening, the trial documents may include the completed form requesting the certificate as well as the resolution of the screening committee.

Thus the activity of the screening committee can be traced in the index books and in Magyar Közlöny until the spring of 1950. Its functioning was terminated by a government decree of the Hungarian People's Republic effective from 15 April 1950.⁸⁸ The notices published in Magyar Közlöny provide more precise information than the index books do on the working process of the committee for screening gendarmes. The number of cases per day was between 11 and 71, but there was a day when 172 cases were heard. However, from November 1946 the number of cases was regulated, and until April 1947 forty cases were processed per day most of the time, with between 40 and 50 cases being processed per day thereafter. In 1948, 49 to 50 cases were heard per session. In 1949, the number of cases gradually went down from 50 to 30, and then to ten per session. Finally, in 1950, Magyar Közlöny published only a few 'cleared' verdicts. In the first two years, the number of sessions lay between two to five per month. In 1947/1948, this number was between six and eleven, save a few months. By 1949, the number of sessions went down to between one and five per month. The number of 'cleared' individuals is relatively easy to establish because the notices, from the first published in 1945 to the last in 1950, gave the name, former rank, and place of residence of the cleared person complete with a serial number.

Number of Screening Cases Tried and of Gendarmes Found 'Clean' according to the Notices Published in Magyar Közlöny in 1945–1950

Year	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	Total
Persons Screened	867	1,513	3,857 ¹	4,786	876	--	11,899 ²
Persons Found 'Clean'	64	195	73	52	77	16	477 ³

- 1 Three notices from 1947 are either missing or an error occurred in the numbering. The former is more probable. If the former is true, we must count with about 120 more persons.
- 2 If we assume an additional 120 persons for the year 1947, the total number of persons in the screening procedure was 12,019.
- 3 According to the serial numbers, 481 persons were cleared. However, in 1946 one decision was annulled, and three serial numbers are missing from 1947. The final decision on these cases is unknown so far.

⁸⁸ Decree No. 108/1950. (IV.15.) M.T. of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic on the Subject of the Termination of the Procedures Concerning the Screening of Former Gendarmerial Persons: Magyar Közlöny minisztertanácsi és miniszteri rendeletek tára [Official Gazette Collection of Decrees Issued by the Council of Ministers and the Ministries], 15 April 1950, No. 64, 552.

Thus, on the basis of the sources researched so far it can be said that, contrary to the claim in the scholarly literature on the subject and in other publications, the special screening committee established for former gendarmerie personnel examined approximately 12,000 cases, of which 477 were declared 'clean', a proportion of four per cent.

The picture is further refined if one examines individual cases, too. Gyula Balázs-Piri, former head of Department XX (Gendarmerie) of the Ministry of the Interior was found clean, but he was later removed from Budapest and relocated within the country.⁸⁹ János Papp, former commander of Gendarmerie District X was found clean by the committee in 1945 (Balázs-Piri among others wrote a supporting statement for him), but he was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1950, pardoned in 1957, and acquitted in 1962 for lack of criminal offence. The same János Papp was sentenced to death in absentia by the people's court in Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania), and in 1955 the Hungarian authorities were considering extraditing him to Romania.⁹⁰

It seems safe to conclude that compared to the activities of the screening committees, especially other screening committees working in Budapest, the committee for screening gendarmes passed its verdicts and made its decisions based on significantly more severe principles. As it was spelled out in *Népbírószági Közlöny* (Official Gazette of the People's Courts), "the screening of gendarmes is performed according to the strictest rules."⁹¹ Compared to the general 80 to 90 per cent of 'cleared' cases in civil service procedures,⁹² the committee for screening gendarmes cleared only four per cent.

The retribution against the gendarmes after the Second World War in Hungary, apart from the screening procedures, can be broken down into several phases. In the first phase, between 1945 and 1950, the people's prosecutors and the people's courts initiated legal proceedings against gendarmes with charges of war crimes and crimes against the people, based among other things on information obtained from the screening committee. After the people's courts had been dissolved, criminal courts often continued the cases involving war crimes and crimes against the people until 1956. Simultaneously, charges were brought against some of the prisoners of war taken over from the Soviet Union. Finally, after 1956, fresh proceedings were started "against reactionary forces at home", among them gendarmes as well. I am still in the process of researching the documents in connection with these proceedings. There are, however lists and reports that indicate that during the criminal proceedings against the gendarmes after the Second World War, only a fraction of the charges included wartime crimes, such as participation in the robbing of Jews, in their ghettoisation, and deportation. In the list of 618 chief war criminals compiled on 30 April 1946, only 31 were gendarmes. Most of them had been wanted for participating in the Újvidék (Novi Sad, Serbia) massacre, probably at the request of the Yugoslav authorities. Three Arrow Cross members were on the list for accepting leading positions after the Arrow Cross takeover, and three more for working in the Nemzeti Számonkérő Szervezet (National Organisation of Accountability). This latter organisation also operated during the Szálasi era. Only one officer, László Ferenczy, was described as "the chief organiser of the Jewish deportations", and wanted for that crime.⁹³

89 ÁBTL, A-547, A-940, A-974.

90 ÁBTL, A-547, A-940/1, A-974, V-140.906/2, V-142.803/1.

91 Népbírószági Közlöny [Official Gazette of the People's Courts], 19 January 1946. 13.

92 Tibor Zinner, *Háborús bűnösök pereit. Internálások, kitelepítések és igazolási eljárások 1945–1949* [Trials of War Criminals. Internments, Forced Relocations, and Screening Procedures, 1945–1949], in: *Történelmi Szemle* [Historical Review] (1985) 1, 129–132.

93 ÁBTL, A-612. The names of the 31 gendarme officers are listed in: Kovács, Csendőrsors, 110–111.

We can state with certainty that 5,000 gendarmes were not executed in Hungary after the war. According to the report of the ÁVH in May 1950, the people's courts had convicted 2,473 gendarmes – 142 were at that time still in custody, 2,331 had already been released –, making up nine per cent of all the sentences of the people's court.⁹⁴ In Hungary, altogether 59,429 persons were brought before the people's courts, 26,997 of whom were convicted.⁹⁵ Until 24 February 1951, altogether 227 condemned persons had been executed, this number including fewer than ten gendarmes.⁹⁶

In November 1961, a sub-department of the Ministry of the Interior (II/5-b) compiled a list of names of “Gendarme officers and rank and file serving under Horthy having committed crimes, living in Budapest”, accompanied by “incriminating and compromising data”.⁹⁷ There are 172 names on the list, and in 47 cases (27.3 per cent) the personal data is followed by the information that the person took part in investigations against left-wing, Communist elements during the war. 62 of them (36 per cent) were “against democracy” or nyugatos (‘Westerners’ – which means they liked, or were attracted to, or had connections in, the West) in the 1950s, or took part in the ‘counter-revolution’ in 1956. Only 19 names (eleven per cent) include the additional information that the person took part in establishing one or other of the Jewish ghettos and/or took part in the deportations. The others were “Arrow Cross”, “embezzlers”, or “illegally possessing firearms”.

By July 1962, the relevant department of the Ministry of the Interior had completed the national register of former gendarmes. Of the 10,000 former gendarmes, merely 113 (1.1 per cent) were marked as having taken part in the persecution, ghettoisation, and deportation of Jews, or as having been cruel to the persecuted or to military forced labourers.⁹⁸

After the Second World War, the gendarmerie could no longer operate as an agency of public security since it symbolised the Horthy regime.⁹⁹ The few gendarmes who were cleared had difficulties finding jobs, and most of them were employed as unskilled workers, or worked in agriculture. Those who were indicted received prison sentences ranging from a few years to fifteen years or internment, the punishments being handed down by the people's courts until 1950, and later by municipal and county courts. However, the ghettoisation and deportation of Jews were included in only a fraction of the charges of war crimes or crimes against the people that were brought to the courts. The interrogating officers, attorneys, and judges were much more interested in the anti-Communist, than anti-Jewish activities of the gendarmes. To quote György Gyarmati, after the Second World War “[t]here was no mercy for the ruling class and the lackeys of the former regime, the Horthy era”. The latter included gendarmes, too.¹⁰⁰

94 ÁBTL, A-618.

95 Tibor Zinner, *XX. századi politikai perek. A magyarországi eljárások vázlata, 1944/1945–1992* [Twentieth-Century Political Trials. The Scheme of the Procedures in Hungary 1944/1945–1992], Budapest 1999, 32.

96 *Ibid.*

97 ÁBTL, A-973.

98 The register of former gendarmes is contained in ten folders in: ÁBTL, A-969–A-969/9.

99 Gendarmes between the two world wars took their oath upon Regent Horthy first, and then upon the constitution.

100 György Gyarmati, *Ellenségek és bűnbakok kavalkádja Magyarországon (1945–1956)* [Patchwork of Enemies and Scapegoats in Hungary, 1945–1956], in: 24 (2000) July–August/7–8, 17.

Judith Molnár,
Historian, Szegedi Tudományegyetem/University of Szeged
judit.molnar3@gmail.com

Quotation: Judit Molnár, Crime and Punishment? The Hungarian Gendarmerie during and after the Holocaust, in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods, Documentation 4 (2017) 1, 59-77.

http://simon.vwi.ac.at/images/Documents/Articles/2017-1/2017-1_Articles_Molnar/Articles_Molnar01.pdf

Article

Copy Editor: Tim Corbett

S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON.
ISSN 2408-9192

Board of Editors of VWI's International Academic Advisory Board:
Peter Black/Gustavo Corn/Irina Sherbakova

Editors: Éva Kovács/Béla Rásky
Web-Editor: Sandro Fasching
Webmaster: Bálint Kovács
Layout of PDF: Hans Ljung

S:I.M.O.N. is the semi-annual e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) published in English and German.