

The thesis of the PhD dissertation

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The dawn of the 1st Hungarian Corps in 1848-49

(Organization in the period of the self-supporting corps)

I. Aims

The specialized literature on the topic of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848-49, that introduces the military history, is remarkably wide, however it also shows some weak point in higher units, like history of the corps. The main purpose of the dissertation is to reveal the actions and the coherence of the corps – which is first of all based on the organization of the army, in the second place based on natural forces and the aptitude of the enemy –from December 1848 to February 1849 that happened behind the actions of war. The further aims of my work is to present an analysis based on the available sources, which can be definable in time and space and be the model of a self-supporting higher unit.

I analysed four interconnected issues in my dissertation:

1. Why did the Pulszky-corps lost the battle of Budamér on the 11th of December 1848? What information did the National Defence Committee have about the expected attack, and what actions were made by the local commissioners to defend the attack? What was the result of the organization of the corps before the battle?
2. On the 4th of January 1849 the newly arranged army was disastrously defeated, which could have had negatively effected the success of the resistance that was organized behind the defence line of River Tisza. I analyse what could have been the reasons that lead the ‘Northern Mobile Corps’ into such a rout, after this huge organizing. The question is how did the National Defence Committee react on the defeat at Budamér, what were the priorities that they expected from the leadership of the corps. What are the reasons that are originated in the evolved optimism of the National Defence Committee, the civil and military leaders of the area, and the soldiers itself, that made them trust so much in the conquest and destruction of the Schlik-troops? What kind of army-organization work was made after Szemere and Mészáros arrived to the military post until the beginning of the operations, in what result did it end? Beside the battle of Kassa, why did the diversions of Mészáros fail too?
3. The Hungarian corps after the middle of January succeeded against the Schlik-troops all the way up the line. Is it only due to the exchange of the commissioner –Mészáros abdicated – Colonel György Klapka and his excellence and personal qualities, or where there other reasons that played an important part in the success of the army? Also came up, how did the enlisted army change after the 4th of January and how did it affect the operation. Did Mészáros do any useful organizations until he arrived to Klapka’s military post? How could Klapka use the organizational base in the future that Mészáros and Szemere established? What were Klapka’s excellences as a commander-in-chief? How did Klapka and Szemere as a commissioner related to each

other and how did it affect the operation? What other conditions played part in the success of the corps?

4. In the end we have to raise the issue of what were the organizational problems all the way long in the history of the corps, however the organization showed lots of enthusiasm. Also raises a question, what were the reasons of the failure of the organization?

The dissertation analyses these issues in 3 major chapters. The first chapter is the introduction part, it presents the military actions. It's purpose is to integrate, specify and synthesize the specialized literature, leaning on the corresponding sources, and at the same time it clears the ground for chapter two. I divided the first chapter into four subsections. The first two subsections correspond with the sections of the corps history (1 from the beginning to the defeat at Budamér, 2 from the defeat at Budamér to the defeat at Kassa), the next two subsections separate the events of the middle of January and the end of January the beginning of February.

The next chapter analyses in detail all the available powers and tools in separate subsections. The first subsection details the army elements, especially the changes of the number of soldiers, the changes of the members of the permanent workers and the staff of officers, examines the position of the artillery, presents the available armament, the discipline of the soldiers, and last the exploratory spy works of the corps. The second subsection touches upon the economic issues, also the financial resources, and the presentation of the provisioning, clothing and hygienic circumstances. The third subsection analyses the political surroundings. First of all it presents the actions of the commissioner related to the corps organization, then it introduces the public opinion on the territories of the operations.

The third short chapter demonstrates the effects of the break in the weather on the operations.

II. The method and material

From the sources that are in public use I used the Hungarian National Archive, the Military History Archive, the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archive, the Heves County Archive, and from the Austrian public use of sources I used the documents from the Viennese Kriegsarchiv.

At the Hungarian National Archive in the H section I used mixed files (147) and I also analyzed the files of the Audit Office. I used writings from the National Defence Committee, the 1848-49 Ministry of War, the National Guard Command, files of several commissioners: The files from the archive of the Görgey-family in the P section, the files of Henryk Dembiński and Colonel György Klapka from the R section.

I used the files of the Military History Archive, based on the revolution and war of independence of 1848-49.

In my research at the country archives I analyzed the files of commissioner Sámuel Farkassányi at Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archive, the files of the County General Assembly at Heves County Archive.

From the Viennese Kriegsarchiv I surveyed the Alte Feldakten 1. Korps unter Schlik.

The main part of the dissertation is based on two authorities about the early history of the corps, which was redacted by József Hajagos, Róbert Hermann and myself. Also very useful source the XIII. and XIV. volume of All labour of Lajos Kossuth, and the 1848-49 correspondence of Bertalan Szemere, redacted by Róbert Hermann and István Pelyach.

I also looked over the German sources from 1848-48 at the Military History Archive, the Borsod-Abaúj-Zempén County Archive and the Viennese Kriegsarchiv.

I used sources, redacted by Aladár Urbán, files from second volume of Lajos Batthyány prime minister, military affairs, militiaman. Documents of Dénes Pap, archive of Eszter V. Waldapfel, and also many contemporary journals and memorials were used.

In the first chapter the analysis of the sources was chronological. In this chapter I rely on the earlier literature (Gábor Bona, József Borus, József Breit, Tamás Csikány, József Hajagos, Róbert Hermann, Gyula Kedves, István Kovács, Sándor Soupper (Szuper), Johann Nobili, Wilhelm Rüstow and many others.

The second chapter is organized thematically, in the case of subsections chronological. This chapter was mostly based on the analysis of the sources.

I also used chronological organization in the third chapter, and I was also based on the analysis of the sources. The subsections of the second and third chapter were divided into three parts by paying attention to the sections of the corps history (1. from the beginning to the defeat at Budamér, 2. from the defeat at Budamér to the defeat at Kassa, 3. from the defeat at Kassa to the self-operation break off).

III. Results

As a matter of fact, the National Defence Committee was already informed about the incursion of the Schlik-troops in November, but Kossuth did not pay much attention to the report of the local commissioners about the incursions. He thought that the commissioners exaggerated the level of the danger – just like at the appearance of the Simunich-column. On the other hand, the commander-in-chief of the affected region, Sándor Pulszky, could not complete his role, he was out of his region because of previous assignments, and he was only back right before the incursion. While he was away, the chiefs of the north-eastern counties, like Dániel Irányi, the commissioner of Sáros County, had to supervise his army too, however nobody was officially appointed as full power-commissioner.

Many northern counties reported expected incursion that is why nobody knew it for sure where in North-Eastern Hungary the enemy is going to break in. On the 5th of December, right before the incursion of Schlik, Pulszky wrote to Kossuth, that the enemy is gathering around Dukla, but at the same time they expected break ins at Szepes and Máramaros. Therefore until the incursion of the imperial-royal corps, the Hungarian soldiers were on the war-path of the borders of the whole County. Demonstrable, that after the imperial-royal break in until the battle of Budamér, the further corps could not join, or joined late to the Hungarian forces.

As a matter of fact, on the 11th of December in the battle of Budamér, Pulszky-corps was not only few in numbers, but also very weak. Three honvéd battalions fought against the enemy, two of them joined way after the battle started, and they consisted of conscriptees who were very badly armed and trained. The militiamen of the counties of Eperjes could only be forced to join the Hungarian army, the chief of the Abaúj cavalry disbanded his army, this is why the Hungarian troops coped out. The only operational corps was the two company of Polish soldiers, who could successfully cover the Hungarian withdrawal.

According to the reminiscence of the military and civil leadership, the slavs in the northern counties made the organization more difficult for the Hungarian army. Hard fact, that the area where mostly Slovaks lived, took sides with Schlik, but we should not generalize. On the concern of the corps, the “Hungarian” sources like to emphasize the resistance of the slav people, and the worthlessness of the Hungarian soldiers. Sometimes we find proofs for the opposite, which draws attention to the fact, that we should handle all information incredulously and critically.

We know from previous studies, that the imperial-royal corps, which went against Pulszky’s troops, was a regular army; at the battle of Budamér most of the corps was there to fight and at the very beginning of the battle they already staggered the enemy. Schlik forced Pulszky – who did not want to give up on Kassa without a fight – to undertake the fight at Budamér. The purpose of the imperial-royal commissioner was to destroy the army that was organized against them, before the Hungarian reinforcement arrived. He only succeeded partly, thanks to the weather and Fiedler brigadier-general, who could not complete his task, because the 19. patriotic battalion arrived, so it ended with the victory of the imperial-royal army, but the Hungarian corps got a chance to reorganize itself.

Obviously, the National Defence Committee recognized the serious issues of the situation, that was caused by the incursion on the 6th of December and the defeat on the 11th of December. Before the battle, there were commissioners assigned to the local counties, so that they recruit the troops, and sent soldiers to the organized corps; after 11th of December more troops were sent to the military post at Miskolc, and two members of the National Defence Committee, Bertalan Szemere and Lázár Mészáros were appointed civil and military leaders. They were not only expecting success against Schlik and recapture Kassa, but also thought they could close in on the enemy and make them surrender.

As a matter of fact the major part of the Mészáros-corps consisted of the local counties’ national guards, and the regular forces were mostly recruit battalions. The arriving patriotic battalions and national guards were untrained, unarmed and were for lack of officers, this is how they arrived to the military camp at Miskolc. Besides, the artillery and the cavalry of the corps was under expectations. The transporter of the artillery did not even until the middle of December, even in the beginning of January it was still under organization. The regular cavalry was substituted by volunteer militiamen from Heves County, who played an active role in the operation. The significant part of the cavalry was the 1200 volunteer trooper from Heves County, with no sufficient armament and training until 4th of January 1849, so it is no surprise they were the main character of the defeat at Kassa.

Schlik did not think that the available sources are fit for service and for further fighting, which gave an opportunity for the Hungarians to reorganize the troops. The reorganization was a huge push even from the civil and the military leadership, the basics of the

organized corps fell into places, but this few day were not enough to help the training, discipline, clothing, armament and most importantly the provisioning issues.

The forthcoming operations did not give any reason to be optimistic. On 28th of December the Mészáros-corps had it's first confrontation with the enemy, and it was not clearly a victory, but the secretary of war got some news from Schlik's serviceman, that he got back the earlier optimism. Such news as, the imperial-royal soldiers are mostly recruits. But the Hungarian troops had lot of recruits too, so they could only rely on diversions and the huge headcount. Moreover, there were problems with the ammunition supplement, and it was not an issue in the Schlik-troops.

At the battle of Kassa, to gain more success, Mészáros planned a diversion against Schlik which would divide his power, but it turned out to be a failure. The first operation, against Eperjes, was unsuccessful because the two Hungarian troops should have shown up at the same time, instead they started the operation with 3-4 hours of difference; besides, the garrisons of Eperjes already knew about the plan. At the second operation– where the target was Schlik's left wing – however, the Zemplén detachments occupied the Dargói pass, they could not keep it; a smaller imperial-royal troop was sent, and the Hungarians were so surprised that they ran away without fighting.

On the 4th of January at Kassa, the Hungarian army was superior in numbers against the imperial-royal troops, but they could not take advantage of it. The lining up of the troops was not smooth, and the imperial-royal artillery kept blocking them, so the sweep was unsuccessful. The side-operation against the left wing determined the operation, which resulted in the disintegration of the left wing; the cop-out of two squadrons Lehel-hussars and cavalry militia of Heves, whirled the central troops too.

As a matter of fact, Mészáros had the ability of organising and could have been able to develop the organization of the corps, if he had the support of the enthusiastic national commissioner, Szemere and a well functioning general staff. Nevertheless, the corps did not have the strength to operate as a military higher unit. Szemere took advantage of this numbers of times, and firmly encroached into clearly military issues. Mészáros, as a secretary of war got used to this kind of behaviour from Kossuth, so did not confront the national commissioner-in-chief, so Szemere started to discover his talent as a general. The national commissioner-in-chief criticized the spirit and attitude of the staff of officers, and urged Mészáros to take firm actions against them. The secretary of war agreed with the critical observation, but because of his characteristics, he wanted to avoid deterrence, so he kept the strict tone of the general orders. The lack of strength incapacitated Mészáros as a general, which he admitted exercising self-criticism, after the defeat at Kassa. On the 9th of January 1849, instead of the retiring Mészáros, the National Defence Committee appointed György Klapka as new commander-in-chief and colonel at the same time. Part of the reorganization is credited to Mészáros as commander-in-chief, because they had to wait a few more days for Klapka to arrive.

The Hungarian loss in battle at Kassa on the 4th of January was considerable – nearly 200 dead, 400 prisoners of war, 10 cannons, significant amount of weapons and ammunition – compared to the earlier confrontations, they also lost the optimism from the second part of December, that made them believe they can defeat and destroy Schlik. It was hard bringing to life the hopes again. The corps needed to be reorganized, which was even more difficult than in December.

The headquarters transferred from Miskolc to Tokaj in the period of Mészáros, so the available troops of the Corps were centred upon Miskolc and Tokaj. Also a highlight, organized outposts were developed in the line of Szikszó-Szentistvánbaksa-Monok-Tállya, and on the north from Tokaj, cruiser troops of Sátoraljaújhely and Sárospatak were observing the manoeuvres of the enemy. The brigades and detachments that composed the corps, were located around Miskolc, Szikszó, Megyaszó, Szerencs, Tállya, Bodrogkeresztúr and Tokaj.

Obviously the corps were reorganized by the end of January – so before Klapka arrived to the military post. Many militia left the military post of the corps, after the battle not only soldiers returned, but the reinforcement arrived and it did not only raised the number of the power but the value too, because these were experienced soldiers. The corps of István Zákó, the commander of the 34th honvéd battalion – eg. the 34th honvéd battalion and the second 12-pounder half battery – was outstanding and played a vital part in the forming corps' victories in January. All in all, the corps led by Klapka was fewer in numbers as compared to the one during Mészáros, but it consisted of regular, experienced troops, so the value of the power was greater.

The military organization of the Corps and the general staff was established during Mészáros, the writing of the presidential register started after the arrival of Lázár Mészáros, on 19th of December. The better organization could be recognized on the division of the corps into brigades. Mészáros, as I already mentioned, had a good sense for strategy, but it is a fact, Klapka – as an earlier general staff officer – had outstanding abilities on this field. The corps' staff of officers and other governmental organizations were more organized in the period of Klapka, than in the period of Mészáros. The staff of officers flared with new officers, also staff of officers were brought under the brigadier-generals, if no staff of officers were appointed, than the assistants of the brigadier-general were in charge. Besides all that, Klapka took his brigadier-generals into the decision-making on the corps operational issues. There is something to be said for the fact, that national commissioner Szemere can be found on the side of both Mészáros and Klapka – sometimes way too much – as an active, corps organizing power, which appears to be a continuity in the arrangements. Klapka did not want Szemere to have such voice in the corps organization as Mészáros gave him, especially not to have command in clearly military issues, or the organizing of military officers. Mostly after of the arrival of Klapka, there were many confrontations between the national commissioner-in-chief and the commander-in-chief, indeed, they put aside the clashing options and tacitly compromised for the success of the corps, as a common interest. The operational area in Klapka's period was where the people lived, who were supporters of self-defendant fight, which was favourable for the Hungarian Corps. The commander-in-chief got information from several towns about the sweeping imperial-royal sweeping troops, while Schlick was almos isolated from the outer world.

Klapka's advantage in the operation was that he only had to make defensive operations against Schlik's troops, who were attacking from the direction of Kassa. Schlik – however the imperial-royal troop as a reinforcement was on the way – wanted an earlier decision-making against the reorganizing Hungarian corps. It came at the price that he could only use part of the available troops to go against Klapka. Schlik's withdrawal ended the battle at Tarcal, because of the fog, he presumed the Hungarian corps was stronger than actually. The day after, the battle at Bodrogkeresztúr was due to the fact, that the leader of the imperial-royal detachment did not get the command that Schlik was placed to Mád, so he

started to attack. At first the confrontation was favourable for the imperial-royal troop, however after the Hungarian reinforcement arrived they were forced to run away, only the fog prevented them from the enclosure. By the end of January the Schulzig-division arrived to the operational area and joined forces with Schlik's troops. Schlik decided to continue the offensive operation, and started up to occupy the Tokaj-pass. Schlik was only attacking with a very small part of his forces, and it was obvious for the Hungarian high command, where exactly he is planning to cross the Tisza. The River Tisza provided a natural defensive line for Klapka's troops, where they could constantly check upon the crossing spots between Tiszafüred and Kenézlő, and made them impassable in several ways, eg. breaking the ice. The weather was favourable for the Hungarian troops, after it started to warm up, the ice melted and made the crossing insecure. The 34th honvéd battalion and the Hungarian 12-pounder half battery played a determinative part in the battle at Tokaj on the 31st of January; the imperial-royal artillery could not unfold, and the ammunition was in danger because the Hungarian canons were continuously firing. Schlik finally decided to withdraw. There was no time left for another attack against the pass, because the commander of the imperial-royal troop got news about Görgei's breaking in to the Szepesség, so Schlik retraced to Kassa with his main forces.

It must be admitted, beside all the military successes in January, the corps were struggling with serious organizational problems.

As a matter of fact, they could not eliminate the indiscipline in the corps which was dominant all along, due to Klapka's peaceful resolutions and compromising temperament. The commander-in-chief made many commands in disciplinary issues, but they only existed in documentation, because there was no observation. Klapka's vagueness in disciplinary issues made many people desert, and there were also continuous impositions in the case of the armament and provisioning. National commissioner-in-chief Szemere brought this into the commander-in-chief's notice, and even he took action. The ministry of war contested to protect the order. On the 28th, Mézáros, in the decree formulated by the ministry of war, made Klapka to establish martial laws, and – ex post facto! – commanded to go in quest of the troops, who caused damages to the citizens. They could not put an end to the indiscipline, because the discipline should have been assured by the commanders of the troops, but they did not set a good example. The indiscipline went too far, the non-appearance of commanders and officers from their troops. The primary excuse was usually the "absent through illness", which infected most unit's officers.

It is also obvious, that the proper ammunition supply of the available weapons was still unsolved. The arms factory, moved from Pest to Nagyvárad, could partly serve the needed amount and was always overdue. The unnecessary transportation of the corps' ammunition through Tiszafüred only extended the difficulties. The conception of establishing an arms factory that serves the corps, at Hajdúböszörmény, did not materialize. There was nothing left to Klapka and Szemere, but to urge the National Defence Committee to send ammunitions. In default of ammunition they had to face difficulties after the 22-23rd of January at battles of Tarcál-Bodrogkeresztúr and 31st of January at Tokaj, when the resources were on the minimum. As a result of the continuous reinforcements, the commander of the ammunition storage at Nyíregyháza reported to be ran out of resources on the 1st of February.

It is a fact, that in the second reorganization of the corps they still could not solve the provisioning issues, which caused the decline of discipline, and sometimes even led to contravention. The primary problem was that there was no co-ordination between the provisioning commissioner, the provisioning officers and the soldiers. It was a problem, that provisioning commissioner Sámuel Farkassányi wanted to hold on to the theories, he did not take into consideration the continuous moving of the corps. Also caused problems that he wanted to supply the troops from Miskolc, even when they were located around Szerencs and Tokaj. He only moved his base to the headquarters of the corps after Szemere and Klapka warned him on 16th of January. Farkassányi cannot be condemned for wishing to make a more organized base for the provisioning than earlier. He already asked Klapka in the middle of January, that the corps could only take provision at a charge of a signed receipt. He assigned seven provision operating officers, who had to provide smooth provisioning, they all orientated to the post of the corps. As a response to the request, Klapka took action, still the provisioning did not show any improvement, it turned especially critical during the battles on the 22-23rd of January, and after. The brigade commanders were continuously complaining about the lack of needed food. The headquarter came up with a resolution, based on Farkassányi's plans, which covers every areas of the provisioning, from the consolidation of the voucher system, to the assignment of provisioning commissioners supervisors and the executive provisioning officers. But it did not solve the problems. First of all Farkassányi did not get the checklist of the provisioning commissioners, on the second hand they ignored the enactment of the national commissioner and acted arbitrarily. There were specific cases when Farkassányi denied to pay off, when it was reasonable for the military service to distribute nutrition.

The dissertation exceeds the specialized literature in several points, first of all they only analyse the events of the war in apropos of the corps operation and did not search the process of the organization that remains in the background. On the other hand this dissertation is the first to examine the great number of archive files, which can be found in the national and county archives, related specifically on the history of the corps. According to the studied documents obviously, we have to change sides on our previous thoughts, that we treat negatively the actions of Lázár Mészáros, commander-in-chief. Mészáros – as it turned out – was not able to lead a self-supporting higher unit, but he had a good sense for strategy, which he proved during his period of being commander-in-chief. We adjudge Klapka's period as a commander-in-chief positively, but when we evaluate the events, it should be taken into consideration, that he only arrived to the headquarters in the middle of January. Until the middle of January the reorganization of the corps already started under the Mészáros's period as commander-in-chief, by the order of the National Defence Committee, there were many troops sent to the military camp in the beginning of January, but they only arrived more or less in the middle of January. The victories in January are beyond dispute, it is not credited to the Hungarian strategy, but more likely to the environmental factors. Klapka had an outstanding sense for strategy, but still there were many basic organizational problems in the beginning of February – the most outrageous ones were the provisioning and the discipline issues – which could not be solved.

The dissertation not only exceeds the foregoing specialized literature, but during the process reveals unprocessed areas. Especially the analysing of the 1848-1849. military intelligence service, processing of the economic history in the war of independence, analysing climatology and the coherence between that periods weather and the operations, the provisioning of the corps was also expertly dissected.

IV. The Author's Publication Concerning the Topic

The Upper Tisza Corps and the difficulties of reorganisation from December 1848 to the beginning of January 1849. Published: Independent and modern Hungary 1848/49. The compilation studies of the academic competition and conference which was inviting applications for the 150th anniversary of the Revolution and War of Independence 1848-49, by Students of History Association. Edited by Gábor Öry, Budapest, 2000., 24-50.

Miklós Puky, the national commissioner of the War of Independence 1848-49. Published: Mátra studies. Edited by László Horváth, Gyöngyös, 2001., 197-218.

The organization of the Northern Mobile Corps. (Problems of organization and military failures at the turn of 1848-1849.) Published: Aetas 2001/2., 104-133.

The Upper Tisza Corps. The difficulties of reorganisation and the first victories in January 1849. Published: Articles of the Military History 2002/3., 703-739.

Files of the I. Hungarian Corps in 1848-49 (1st volume: from the formation to the defeat at Kassa on 4th of January 1848-49). The introduction studies were written and the files were selected and redacted by Dezső Dér and József Hajagos. Edited by József Hajagos. References 9., of the Heves County Archive, Eger, 2002, 293.

Files of the I. Hungarian Corps in 1848-49 (2nd volume: from the reorganization in January and the first victories). The introduction studies were written and the files were selected and redacted by Dezső Dér, József Hajagos and Róbert Hermann. Edited by József Hajagos. References 10., of the Heves County Archive, Eger, 2004, 362.

The 20th honvéd battalion, the story of an unsuccessful organization of corps in 1848-49. Published: A források bővületében Ünnepi tanulmányok for the 75th birthday of Tamás Katona. Edited by Róbert Hermann and Péter Zakar, Szeged, 2007, 61-86.