

Hungarian Parachute Units

Introduction

"Now we just need something about the Quartermaster Corps!" Something along those lines sounded a comment from a faithful reader after my article on the Hungarian Flotilla was published. Thanks, Kare!

However, this new article is not about the supply troops, although the topic could be quite as interesting to deal with, but about another, at least as interesting topic - namely Hungarian paratroopers. There is also a rather special detour, which almost comes on par with the Intendanturkorpset.

Unfortunately, the available sources are extremely sparse regarding the mention of the paratroopers, but here is what I have been able to piece together.

The story

1st Parachute Battalion

During the Hungarian participation in the invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, a company from 1. Parachute battalion dropped with the task of capturing two bridges over the Franz-Josef Canal that were vital to the advance overland.

The battalion commander - lieutenant colonel [vitéz 1](#)) Arpád Bertalan - led the command of the force that took off from Veszprém air station in four Savoia-Marchetti SM-75 transport aircraft. The battalion commander's plane unfortunately had to make an emergency landing immediately after takeoff due to hydraulic problems and during a subsequent attempt to salvage equipment and ammunition, the lieutenant colonel, the pilot and 22 men died when the plane exploded.

The rest of the force - 3 officers and 57 men - were flown forward to the drop zone, which lay behind the Yugoslav lines. From the drop zone the force marched to the bridges at Szenttamás and Verbasz, which were quickly captured.

As far as is known, this parachute drop was the only one the battalion took part in.

The parachute battalion was originally only company-sized, but at the beginning of 1941 the unit was built up to battalion size - among other things by the addition of personnel from the civil aviation company.

The next time the sources mention the paratroopers is at the formation of the *Szent-László* infantry division on 12 October 1944. Now the force has grown to regimental size (1st Parachute Regiment) and consists of a parachute battalion of three companies, a training battalion and a heavy battalion (a machine gun company, a mortar company and an engineering company). At this point - along the lines of German parachute units - it is more about name than benefit, as Hungary no longer had the transport capacity that made parachute dropping possible.



The photograph comes from Source 2 and is the only one I know of where it is possible to get an impression of the camouflaged cover jacket of the screen straps.

Judging by the caption, it shows paratroopers on the march in Budapest, in 1944. The picture should come from the Museum of Modern History in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The division, which was an elite unit, also consisted of the 2nd Grenadier Regiment (the 1st Guards Battalion and the 2nd Battalion/Royal Gendarmerie). The division's third regiment was designated 3.

Fortress Regiment (or "Air Force Infantry Regiment" and consisted of various ground and other Air Force personnel). The artillery consisted of the 1st, 9th (21 cm and 30.5 cm howitzers) and 76th Artillery Division (21 cm howitzers) as well as the 6th Motorized Artillery Division and the 1st Rocket Launcher Division (15 cm Nebelwerfer) (the Hungarian Army's only division of this type). It also included the 20th Assault Gun Division (a mix of StuG III, Hetzer and Zrinyi assault guns), an engineer battalion, a reconnaissance battalion and an anti-tank division (a battery of towed German 7.5 cm anti-tank guns and a battery of Hetzer-type tank destroyers). The head of the division was Major General Zoltán Szügyi.

The division entered combat for the first time on 19 December 1944, where it took part in the battles for Budapest. The division functioned almost like a "fire brigade" with the units deployed separately. Later, the division takes part in the defense of Budapest, but does not become part of the entrapped forces. Further through 1945, the division takes part in the battles at Batalton Lake, to end the war in Austria, where on 8 or 11 May 1945 (sources vary) it surrenders to British forces.



The national aviation company MALÉRT 3) (*Magyar Légiforgalmi Rt*) had, among other things, 3 aircraft of the type Junkers JU-52 and 5 aircraft of the type Savoia-Marchetti SM-75.

In accordance with the mobilization plans, the company ceased operations on 16 January 1941. The pilots and other staff as well as 5 SM-75 transport aircraft were enlisted in the Air Force, which established 2. Transport squadron. The machines were rebuilt so that they could be used by paratroopers and the engines were given a thorough overhaul.

Additionally (later?), one of the machines was equipped for medical transport - 8 patients on stretchers and 6 seated patients. This plane later crashes near Budapest, en route to the front in Russia.

The remaining machines are later returned to Italy due to severe wear and tear.



A Savoia-Marchetti transport aircraft of the type SM-75.

The drawing comes from Source 3.

Just below the cockpit is the squadron's insignia - a mushroom, or perhaps rather a parachute!

Uniforms

From sources 4, 7 and 8, something can be deduced about the paratroopers' uniforms. Based on the subsequent drawings, my conclusion is that the uniforms followed the army's uniform regulations. A description of the army's uniforms can be found in the article on *Hungarian hussar uniforms during the Second World War*.

The weapon color is shown as green, i.e. the color of the infantry, and if the drawings are to be believed, then there was no special weapon color for the paratroopers.

The Szent-László Division



First Lieutenant, 1944



Sergeant, 1945.

The first lieutenant's cover jacket is made of tent flap model 38.M. The source states that the overcoat is inspired by the corresponding German one. The field cap is model 21.M, on which the officer's insignia is displayed (under the national cockade). The riding boots are model 41.M. The pistol holster is model 35.M and the field compass in the right hand is model 39.M. The paratroopers' green weapon color shown on the collar mirrors is equivalent to that of the infantry.

Comparing the dust jacket to the above photograph, it appears to be somewhat less stained than the paratrooper with the right arm raised.



Paratrooper, 1944-45

The drawing of the officer comes from Kilde 8, a website which is otherwise about an American collector's production of uniforms for dolls of the GI-Joe type! I have - without success - tried to get in touch with the owner of the website, a man named Jason Ring, in order to try to obtain information about his sources for the uniform.

The sergeant is equipped with the Hungarian 9 mm machine gun 43.M., whose stick magazine held 40 cartridges.

Unfortunately, it is not clear from the source text whether the sergeant wears a rolled-up overcoat or a tent flap (raincoat) on his bread bag.

The paratrooper wears trousers and boots of model 43.M and fabric gaiters. The steel helmet is model 35.M, with a locally produced obscuring net. Two hand grenades model 42.M are carried in the waist belt. The submachine gun is a Hungarian 9 mm submachine gun 43.M; two magazine pouches are also carried in the waist belt (6 magazines in each pouch).

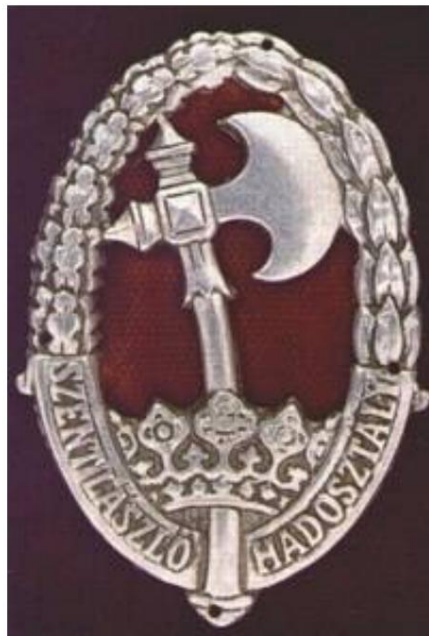
My sources are somewhat unclear about the dust jacket; it apparently existed in two versions - one for officers and one for the crew. If the information is credible that tent flaps have added fabric to the overcoat, then it must be surprising that the green part of the printed pattern is missing... The subject is thus far from exhausted yet.

Brands



The sergeant and paratrooper wears the Hungarian parachute wing model 40.M over the left breast pocket.

The parachute wing is made of nickel-plated metal. The parachute wing was available in versions for officers, non-commissioned officers and crew.



The paratrooper wears the Szent-László division badge on the right breast pocket flap.

The label is made of pressed aluminium.

Judging from the description, the regulations stipulated that the badge - as shown - was worn without a backing, but apparently it was not uncommon for the badge to be supplemented with a backing in the color of the weapon (green).

Wargame units



For use in an upcoming game that includes the Hungarian parachute drop into Yugoslavia in April 1941, I have produced a company of paratroopers.

The figures are from the Airfix set *German Paratroopers* and show the figures in an overcoat painted with inspiration from the above drawing of the First Lieutenant.

It is a bit of a bet, as I do not have knowledge of the exact uniform in April 1941, including information about the headgear of the paratroopers.



The machine gun in the company's support platoon is from the Revell kit *Afrika Korps* and has to make do with a 31.M Solothurn machine gun (see my article *The Hungarian Infantry during the Second World War*) in field service.

I imagine that the paratroopers were equipped with this machine gun, rather than the somewhat heavier (and older) Schwartzlose machine gun 7/31.M.

Sources

1. *The Royal Hungarian Army, 1920 – 1945* by Leo WG Niehorster, Axis Europa Books, New York 1998, ISBN 1-891227-19-X.
2. *The Hungarian Army and Its Military Leadership in World War II* by Andris J. Kursietis, Axis Europa Books, New York 1999 (third revised and expanded edition), ISBN 1-891227-28-9. (<http://www.axiseuropa.com>)
3. *Hungarian Air Force* by George Punka, Squadron/Signal Publications, No. 6069, Carrollton, Texas 1994, ISBN 0-89747-349-3 (reviewed 2 August 2002)
4. *Germany's Eastern Front Allies 1941-45* by Peter Abbott & Nigel Thomas, Osprey Men-at-Arms 131, London 1982, ISBN 0-850454-751. (http://www.ospreypublishing.com/title_detail.php?title=Q4751&ser=MAA)

5. *Axis Allies on the Eastern Front* by Bob Mackenzie, Tac Publications, Oxford 2001.
6. Miscellaneous correspondence in the debate forum Third Reich Forum Here
is an article written under the pseudonym Geppistoly Katona. Although the author does not reveal his sources, the article gives the impression of being well-founded.
7. Contribution to the debate forum <http://www.thirdreichforum.com> from Milan Szekeleyhidi.
8. Model uniform drawing, officer of the paratroopers <http://www.shaolinshamocustoms.freeservers.com>

See also the articles by Henrik Krog:

1. <http://www.geocities.com/kumbayaaa/hungroyparas.html>
2. <http://www.geocities.com/kumbayaaa/hungroyparasdropyugo.html>

which can be found on *ARMIES! European armed forces from 1920 to 1950* <http://www.geocities.com/kumbayaaa/index.html> As far as I can judge, the descriptions are based on Source 1. There are several pictures of the SM-75 aircraft, as well as a single, where paratroopers are waiting to board.

Per Finsted

- 1) *Vitéz* corresponds to the German *von*; and according to Hungarian writing, the person's first name is mentioned last.
- 2) The division was named after one of the most famous Hungarian saints, St. Ladislaus (László), who was the patron saint of all exiles and all men-at-arms. Ladislaus was, before his elevation to sainthood, king of Hungary from 1077 to 1095 under the name King Ladislaus the Good.
- 3) Further information about MALÉRT can be found here: <http://airlines.afriqonline.com/airlines/552.htm> (The information here about the number of SM-75 (aptly named SM-73) is from 1939, so the remaining three machines must have been acquired before January 16, 1941.) <http://www.timetableimages.com/ttmalert.htm> (The above illustration of the timetable as of October 3, 1938 comes from this page.)