

Hungarian hussar uniforms during the Second world War

Introduction

The aim of this article is to describe the uniforms of the Hungarian Cavalry during the Second World War and at the same time to show the pictorial material relating to Hungarian Hussars that I know of, both photographs and uniform drawings.

My hope is that it will be possible to provide additional information on a subject that has not been covered particularly thoroughly, at least when it comes to source material in Western European languages.

Should any readers of the paper be in possession of additional material about Hungarian hussars - either from the interwar years or the Second World War - I would be happy to hear about it, and would be happy to assist with a scan of the photographs or drawings in question.

The hussar regiments

Hungary is the country of origin of the Hussars and a large part of the Hussar traditions originates from here. Very fittingly, all horsemen in the Hungarian army were therefore referred to as hussars (*huzsár* in Hungarian).

The Hungarian army included four hussar regiments:

1. Jasig-Kuman Regiment "Franz-Josef"

2nd Hussar Regiment "Prince Arpad"

3rd Hussar Regiment "Count Nadasdy Ferenc"

4th Hussar Regiment "Count Hadik Andras"

Each regiment consisted of 12 squadrons of 300 men, of which 200 men and their horses joined the squadrons on mobilization. The purpose of this was that a detached squadron should have the same firepower as an infantry company, so that the many horsemen needed in detached combat did not significantly reduce the squadron's firepower. On the minus side, however, the mobilization was delayed, especially because the horses that went to the regiments were neither used to carrying saddles nor to long marches.

The four hussar regiments included two cavalry brigades on mobilization in the Mobile Corps:

1st Cavalry Brigade

3rd and 4th Hussar
Regiment 1st Artillery Group (partly
motorized) 13th and 14th Cyclist Battalion

2nd Cavalry Brigade

1st and 2nd Hussar
Regiment 2nd Artillery Group (partly
motorized) 15th and 16th Cyclist Battalion

The Mobile Corps takes part in the invasion of Yugoslavia on 9 April 1941 - the 2nd Cavalry Brigade takes part in these operations. When the corps is deployed on the Eastern Front at the end of June 1941, 1.

Cavalry brigade in this. The brigade takes part in the more than 2,000 kilometer long advance - and the many battles along the way - to the river Dnieper, which is reached at the end of August 1941.

By this time, the cavalry brigade is worn out and largely unequipped. The horses could not cope with the cold and wet autumn weather and the other hardships; many horses had saddle sores. The main reason for this was the previously mentioned idea of reinforcing the squadrons with extra horses (and soldiers) - horses that were not sufficiently trained for the purpose. An advance of over 2,000 kilometers in just three months had not been conducive to the condition of the horses. Furthermore, the squadrons' manpower was now down to between 70 and 80 men from the original 300. The rest were scattered in the areas the brigade had moved through, tending to their sick horses.

1st Cavalry Brigade is withdrawn to Hungary, where it is re-established.

The experiences of the autumn battles lead the Hungarian Ministry of War to propose that the hussar regiments, in connection with the multiplication of a cavalry division, should give up their horses in favor of bicycles. But the Hungarian Regent and Commander-in-Chief of the Army - Admiral Horthy - despite the War Ministry's protest - vetoed this proposal, valuing the ancient hussar traditions and ordering the formation of the cavalry division to be expedited.

Kaare Myltoft's article *The Hungarian Cavalry Division* describes the division's efforts. On 1 August 1944, the name 1st Royal Hungarian Hussar Division was awarded for its honorable efforts on the Eastern Front.

The 1st Hussar Division perishes during the fighting in Budapest in 1945.

Pictures



Inspection

The caption in Source 1 is: *"Hungary, summer 1941. A Honvéd cavalry squadron."*

The distinguished officer in the center of the picture is a general - golden oak leaf on the side of the cap - accompanied by a German officer.



The caption in Source 1 is: *"Eastern front, near Pervomaysk, August 1941. A Honvéd trooper and horse."*

Note in particular the soldier's long trousers, which were buttoned at the calf according to a special Hungarian uniform tradition. The footwear was short boots and short leather leggings.

Whether it is actually a hussar is not entirely clear. As a rider, he should be equipped with breeches and riding boots, but of course it could be a hussar who is not mounted.



The bowstring is checked

The caption in Source 1 is: *"The Hungarian Mobile Corps. Saddle check before the morning ride."*



Mounted patrol

The caption in Source 1 is: *"Eastern front near Winniza, September 1941. A cavalry patrol by the Hungarian occupation forces. The officer's horse, even by first sight, is clearly a temperamental animal of fine breeding."*

Note how the steel helmet is carried on the right side of the saddle when it is not being worn. Apparently the hussar in the center of the picture is also wearing a steel helmet on the saddle, although he is also wearing his own. Maybe he doesn't ride his own horse.



Horse holders

The caption in Source 1 is: *"Berdichev, autumn 1941. An airy stable for the Honvéd horses."*

The picture gives an impression of what the Hungarian saddle looks like.



Mounted patrol

The caption in Source 2 is: *"In terms of equipment and armament, the Hungarian cavalry division was ill-suited to the demands of the second half of the war. The equipment carried by the rider in the center of the photo is most interesting. Mounted on his saddle is a type of battle-axe. Russia 1944."*

The ax probably serves a somewhat more peaceful purpose than the battle ax - rather it is used to chop firewood.



Hussars on the march

The caption in Source 2 does not describe the image, but only mentions: "*Formed in 1944, the 1st Cavalry Corps had under its command the 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades and the 1st Hungarian Cavalry Division.*"



Parade

The caption in source 3 is: "*An informal parade by Hungarian Cavalry.*"

Unfortunately, the text does not indicate anything about the reason for this parade. What the informality of the parade consists of, I am not clear.



The caption in Source 4 is: "A Hungarian Huszár of the Mobile Corps, summer 1941. Note the distinctive cap flash with its three braids, and the field collar patch."

The image also gives an impression of the horse's bridle, as well as how the hussar's cloak is carried on top of the saddlebags.



Hussars on the march

The caption in Source 5 is: "The Hungarian Mobile Corps, including the 1st Cavalry Brigade, served with the Wehrmacht's 17th Army as part of Army Group South. These well-mounted heirs to the Imperial Hussar tradition distinguished themselves in the first deep advance of summer /autumn 1941, but were worn out by the time winter fell."

The officer in the light trench coat is used as a template for the below drawing of the captain.

Hungarian uniforms, in general

Apart from the introduction of khaki on 1 January 1922, Hungary retained its traditional Austro-Hungarian uniform cut.

The khaki uniform jacket was single-breasted with a high double collar, five matted, in officers gilt, metal buttons to the front and patch breast and side pockets with folds and flaps with buttons. The officer's version, which had only four buttons, was largely identical to the NCOs' and crew's, but shaped with a nipped-in waist and with three buttons on the sleeve cuffs. The shoulder straps were unadorned for non-commissioned officers and crew, while for officers they had a golden lid trim.

Non-commissioned officers and crew wore long khaki trousers and marching boots, which were later replaced by short boots and wraps, the officers breeches and black riding boots.

The uniform coat was double-breasted with a large lapel collar, in generals with a red lapel, two rows of six buttons at the front, double cuffs and side pockets with flaps.

The slanting [hat 1](#)) was high at the front and provided with flaps that were attached to the front. On the front of the cap, the officers wore a varying number of inverted angles according to rank and in addition a round cockade in the national colours, red, white and green. On the left side of the hat was placed a fabric triangle in the color of the weapon edged with grey-yellow. The [felt hat 2](#)) was identical to an Austrian kepi and had the same decoration as the slanted hat.

The steel helmet was the German Model 1915, which during the war was replaced by the German Model 1935.

Hussar uniforms



Major, 1941.
(Source 4)



Captain, 1941.
(Source 5)



Hussars, 1940.
(Source 6)

The uniforms follow the general features listed above, although the hussars wore breeches and riding boots.

The color of arms was light blue for the hussars until 1 October 1942, when the cavalry ceases to be an independent weapon. The hussars were incorporated into a newly created type of weapon called *mobile units*. It included the armored troops, motorized infantry battalions, cyclist battalions and cavalry. The color of the coat of arms became dark blue, and the hussars' former light blue coat of arms is no longer used.

The major, probably the squadron commander, is wearing service uniform, note the collar mirrors, while the captain is wearing field uniform, where the collar mirrors are simpler. The Major's riding boots carry a traditional "hussar decoration" around the edge of the boot shafts as well as a golden rosette just below the edge. The caption in Source 5 assumes that the captain's riding boots are similarly decorated.

The notes to Preben Kannik's drawing in Source 6 unfortunately do not reveal anything about the story behind the feather that the hussar wears in his cap. Source 9 mentions that "a vertical eagle feather was often worn on the left side of the cap".

Sources

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7. *The Royal Hungarian Army, 1920 – 1945* by Leo WG Niehorster, Axis Europa Books, New York 1998, ISBN 1-891227-19-X.
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9. *Uniforms of the World* by Richard Knötel, Herbert Knötel and Herbert Sieg, Arms and Armor Press, London 1980, ISBN 0-85368-313-1. (An English translation of the famous *Handbuch der Uniformenkunde*, from 1937.)

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1) Remarkable about the Hungarian slanted hat is that it also has a short brim. It is usually folded up behind the hat's front flap (under the cockade), but can be folded down when the weather permits. In other words, it almost looks like the traditional field hat. (In the context of figures, it is therefore often possible to also use German figures with field hats as Hungarians.

2) The field hat was in principle only worn by units of the Border Troops

as well as by the mountain hunters.