

MAGYAR FRONT



Vol. XXIII, No. 2

SPRING 2021



THREE GENERATIONS OF SERVICE:

One Hungarian Family's Military History

**Plus: Hungarian Sergeant Earns Silver Star in Tunisia
Also: Revisiting Imperial Yesterdays, One More Time**

A note from the Editor

I'm always delighted and honoured to learn about previously undocumented family histories, and I am sure *Magyar Front* readers will enjoy this issue's presentation by Jeff Toth.* I am very grateful to him and his family for sharing such personal stories, for I have so often witnessed these important historical puzzle pieces neglected and entirely forgotten.

As a Hungarian born far away from the homeland I have had no choice but to be doubly aware of the military sacrifices and service of Hungarians from two (or more) nations, giving people like me a somewhat blurry view of enemies and allies - of victory and defeat. Perhaps those things are impossible to define, however, the thread of service, universal as it is, runs through this narrative and is perhaps the noblest goal and outcome we can hope for. I have chosen to add medal ribbons to illustrate this thread.

I am very thankful for Jeff's enthusiasm and skill in presenting this slice of his family history, and to his brother Steven who has so generously taken part. Their mother, Mary Ann Toth, has also gone above and beyond the call of duty in helping us with photographs.

Our second article by Ferenc Bálint of the Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum is the perfect companion to Jeff's work. A story of another Hungarian-American soldier whose service has been so carefully and diligently preserved. Ferenc, along with some of his colleagues with whom *Magyar Front* readers are very familiar, continues to ensure his museum's exemplary reputation by very kindly and patiently sharing his wealth of knowledge and expertise.

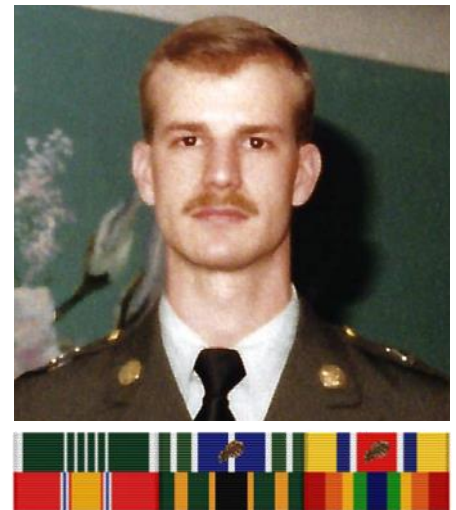
Finally, our last article is Part II of Jack Keir's travelogue (Part I appeared in our Fall 2020 issue). He is sorely missed.

P.Cz

*Jeff (right) enlisted in the United States Army Reserve in 1983 and was trained as an Intelligence Analyst. In 1985 he was selected as Soldier of the Year for 4th U.S. Army Forces Command. By the end of his career he had obtained the rank of staff sergeant.

He completed his service in 1993 when his civilian employer transferred him out of his home state.

His ribbons: Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal (2nd award), Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal (2nd award), National Defense Service Medal, Army NCO Professional Development Ribbon, and the Army Service Ribbon.



Our cover:

Top left: Sándor Tóth (c.1916) - 2nd Class Silver Bravery Medal, Bronze Bravery Medal, and Medal for the Wounded with Three Stripes.

Top right: Steve Toth (1919) - US WWI Victory Medal

Bottom left: Edward Toth (1945) - Bronze Star, Army Good Conduct Medal, Asiatic/Pacific Campaign Medal, European/African/Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, WWII Victory Medal, WWII Occupation Medal, Philippine Defense Medal, Philippine Liberation Medal, and Philippine Independence Medal.

Bottom right: Steven Toth (1987) - Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal (5th award), Army Commendation Medal (4th award), Army Achievement Medal (7th award), Army Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal (2nd award), Afghanistan Campaign Medal (with Campaign Star), Iraq Campaign Medal (with two Campaign Stars), Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Ribbon (2nd award), NATO Medal, Multinational Force and Observers Medal, Valorous Unit Award, and Meritorious Unit Commendation (3rd award).



MAGYAR FRONT VOLUME XXIII, ISSUE 2 SPRING 2021

Published quarterly by
Peter Czink, Editor-Designer

The New Front:
(International Hungarian Military
History Preservation Society)

*"To strive, to seek, to find,
and not to yield."*

Peter Czink
Founder/President

Lorraine Weldeman
Vice-President, Webmaster

Péter v. Laborc
Vice-President, Hungary

John Keir
Vice-President, United Kingdom

George Hennessy
Vice-President, Australia

Manfred Winter
Vice-President, Austria

Dr. Gergely Pál Sallay
Historical Consultant, Correspondent

PO Box 74527 Kitsilano PO
Vancouver, British Columbia
V6K 4P4 Canada

czink@shaw.ca
www.NewFront.ca

©2021 All rights reserved

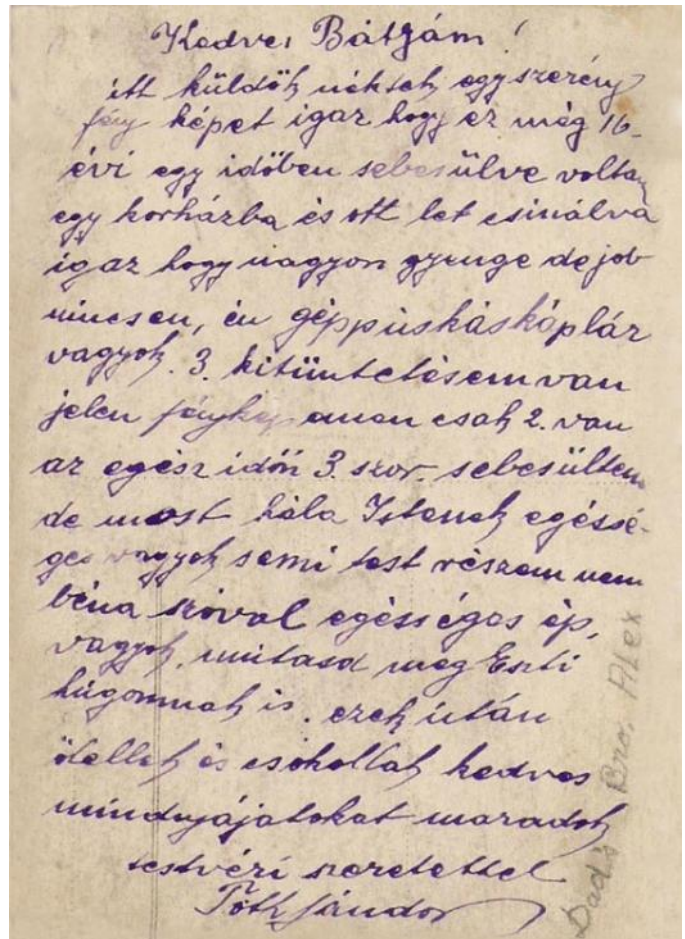
Membership in the
International Hungarian Military History
Preservation Society is \$40.00 annually,
and includes the *Magyar Front*.

The original *Magyar Front* was the
weekly newspaper of the Frontline
Fighter's Association, and was
published from the early 1930s until
the end of the Second World War.

Three Generations of Service:



TOTH FAMILY COLLECTION



One Hungarian Family's Military History by Jeff Toth

The American Civil War (1861-1865), the war against slavery, was notorious for pitting members of the same family against each other; fathers against sons, brothers against brothers. Half a century later, my paternal grandfather, Steve (István) Toth, his younger brother Sándor (Alex) and another brother Ferenc (Francis), fought for opposing sides during World War I, the Great War.

I know little of my grandfather (born in January 1890, and pictured on the following page), as he passed away in March of 1957 before I was born. From family documents we know he immigrated to the United States in June, 1907 from Királyhelmeicz, Austria-Hungary (today Kráľovský Chlmec, located in Košice region of south-eastern Slovakia).

He joined the United States Army on September 19, 1917 in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio. He received his certificate of naturalization at Camp Greene, Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina on June 7, 1918 and was assigned to the 20th Company, 4th Regiment, Air Service Mechanics. He served in France, leaving the U.S. on

July 15, 1918 and returning as Private First Class on June 6, 1919. He was honorably discharged on June 17, 1919. He was issued the Victory Medal on January 22, 1921 in Cleveland, Ohio.

Regretfully, we know even less of my great-uncle Alex, but we are given a glimpse of his character from his words on the back of his photograph pictured above - translated from Hungarian:

"My Dear big Brother, I am sending a photograph of me, although it is from the year '16 [1916]. At that time I was wounded, laying in a hospital and the picture was taken there. It is of poor quality but I don't have any better. I am a machine gunner with the rank of a corporal. I have 3 decorations but on this picture I only had 2. So far I was wounded 3 times but from God's grace I'm not missing any body parts, I am not a cripple, in other words I am healthy. Please show this picture to my sister Eszti [Esther] too. Kisses and hugs for all of you.

With Love Tóth Sándor"

A machine gunner (*géppuskás*), and wounded three times - once would be enough to make a young man think twice about returning to battle. There is no indication of what region he served in, Eastern, Southern or perhaps the Western Front. Regardless, a machine gun crew drew the ire of entire units during an assault.

From his greeting we know that Alex is the younger, and Steve was just shy of 28 years of age at the time of his enlistment (1917). Sadly, we are not sure if Alex survived the war and made it back home to his family.

On close inspection of enlarged sections of the photograph, we can see the distinctive machine gunner's collar insignia (silver colour for other ranks) featuring a three-headed dragon breathing fire under the Crown of St. Stephen. A very apropos symbol to represent the spray of death and destruction within the sector of fire for this weapon system. He states he is a corporal (*káplár*), but I can't make out any stars on his collar tabs, which may mean he was not, back in 1916 when the picture was taken.

His left breast is adorned with two of the three medals he mentioned; closest to his heart is the 2nd Class Silver Bravery Medal followed by the Bronze Bravery Medal.

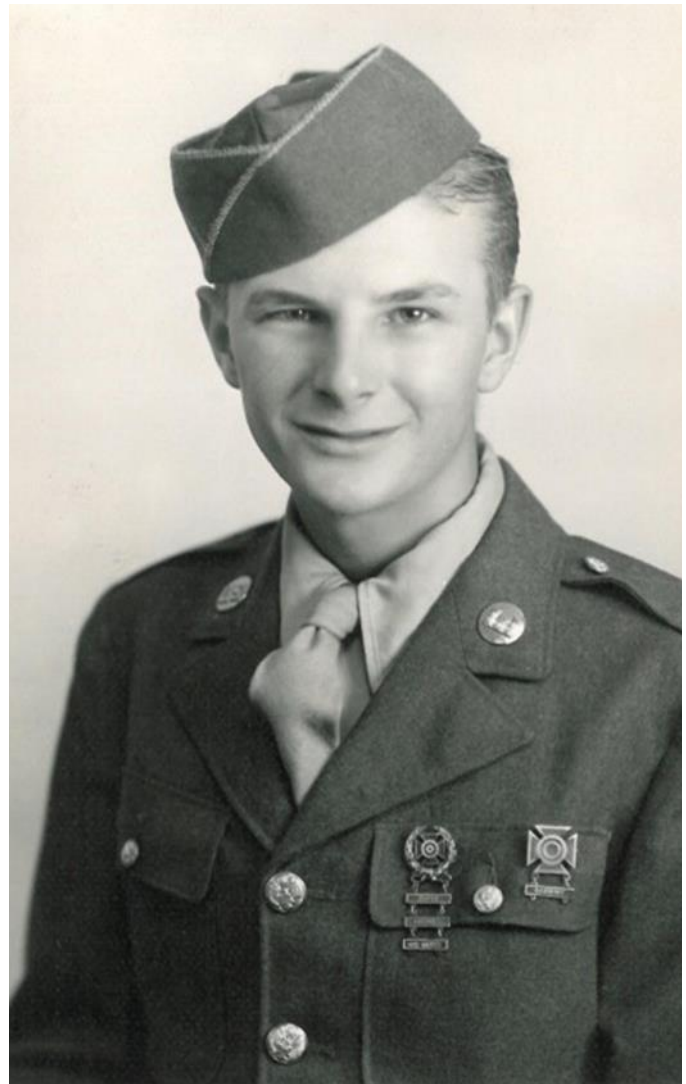
I don't believe he is wearing a belt, that I can tell. It would have been interesting to see which buckle design he was issued. I would also be curious to know which sidearm he carried - most likely the Roth-Krnka (-Steyr) M.1907 or the Frommer STOP; less likely a Steyr (-Hahn) M.1911/12.

In 1919, after settling in Cleveland my grandfather Steven married a Hungarian girl, Sophia Pakozdy. They had four sons who all served in the United States military during World War II, and returned safely at the end of the hostilities. The last of them, my father Edward (youngest of the four), passed away peacefully at home at the age of 94 on February 25th, 2021, under the care of his wife.

In 1953 Edward also married a Hungarian girl - Mary Ann Hartman. They had four sons, all of them served in the United States Army. Recently my youngest brother Steven reminded me of a portion of his career that I felt had



TOTH FAMILY COLLECTION



TOTH FAMILY COLLECTION

Left: Steve Toth (May 23rd, 1919, Châtillon-sur-Seine, France). He's equipped with a Colt Model 1917 .45 Caliber revolver, holstered on his right hip. Right: US Army Combat Engineer Private Edward Toth in 1945, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. He has earned the Expert Weapons Qualification Badge with rifle, bayonet, and hand grenade bars as well as the Sharpshooter Weapons Qualification Badge with carbine bar.



TOTH FAMILY COLLECTION

some bearing on the IHMHPS. He had the opportunity to take part in a short tour with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai.

Steven remembers: "Having just been promoted to first lieutenant in the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, and serving as my battalion's infantry mortar platoon leader, I never imagined I would find myself in the Middle East so quickly, but this is exactly where I would be for six months between January and July of 1999.

Our initial train-up period went well, but as we got closer to the mission, the out-going US Battalion (USBATT) wanted me to know there were "personality clashes" between several of the forces that make up the mission; unfortunately as time got closer, I would find this sentiment was shared by more than just the USBATT.

Luckily my commander saw this early-on and shifted me from my primary position as Mortar Platoon Leader to the most trusted position of Protocol Officer, having heard the last unit failed to select this individual well, and ended up removing him. This position would serve as a lynch pin to many issue resolutions (before they got heated).

Understanding that I was an Airborne Ranger who knew less about protocol than fighting, and that I would have a small staff of three (a Protocol NCO, driver, and Public

MARY ANN TOTH PHOTOGRAPH



TOTH FAMILY COLLECTION



Left: Edward Toth (at 84 years of age) - member of the American Legion veteran's association.

Above: Edward Toth's American Legion uniform cap. On the left side is the American Legion insignia and his home state of Ohio embroidered onto the cap. The right side features the number of his local post (196 for the city of Brecksville) and is further adorned with unit insignia of the Philippine Scouts and the US 86th Infantry Division. Also included is a miniature of his Combat Infantryman Badge and a small American Legion pin.

Affairs Officer/Cameraman), I wisely selected a former infantry platoon squad leader of mine (SSG Sviben) to be my second-in-charge (NCOIC) of the section.

Although my section learned quickly, there was still the concern of how I was going to perform better than the last unit, to bridge the gap between units and countries under our command. As I looked at the structure of the organization, and specifically who seemed to be the glue that kept day-to-day garrison operations in check, I discovered the Military Police unit we would have was staffed by the Hungarian Contingent (HUNCON) and called the Force Military Police Unit (FMPU). Unfortunately, because they were the enforcers, they were consequently not as well appreciated by many of the other units, as law enforcement personnel sometimes discover.

Seeking to bridge this gap and ensure we both started off on the right foot with a common goal, I went to meet them, and this was when I discovered there is indeed, everything in a name. As I went to salute their officer-in-charge, Major Szabó, he instantly smiled from ear to ear, as if he was meeting an old friend. I realized he was looking at my name tag – TOTH. He said, 'Toth, you are Hungarian!' It was an occurrence I watched play out with nearly every FMPU officer I met. They gave me private tours, educated me on

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEVEN TOTH



Above: First Lieutenant Steven Toth during perimeter security check at the South Camp beach entrance, Sinai (Multinational Force and Observers tour).

their jobs, and even invited me to their *gulyás* parties. I, in turn, educated them and my Commander, keeping him informed about matters he had little time for, but could become detrimental to a successful mission if left un-addressed. Though I was only a staff officer (1st Lieutenant) to the USBATT commander (a Lt. Colonel), HUNCON treated me as if I were in charge. And although it was enjoyable and empowering, I wasn't going to abuse this unique position - I would use it to rebuild the bridges that were left shaky by the previous units.

I remember the moment when I knew I was truly welcomed and accepted. Major Szabó was introducing me to his second-in-command, Captain Fülöp, and he looked back at me and asked: 'What do they call you?' Without thinking they meant in a professional environment, I answered: 'My first name is Steve, but my family call me Pista.' With this, they both smiled widely and said, 'It's a good Hungarian name!' I shared as many other Hungarian memories I could recall (mostly food related) and stories from my grandparents relating to our family history in Hungary. By the day's end,



STEVEN TOTH
COLLECTION



everyone was calling me Pista, even my commander, and more importantly, they were listening to what I had to say. We had more than just similarities of national heritage - we (USBATT) were the new unit replacement wanting to make the best name for ourselves, and they (HUNCON) were new to NATO (joining in 1999) and wanted to prove themselves as trustworthy partners. They were proud of being part of NATO. I believe back then, it was a demonstration of not being beholden to their communist past, but rather free to choose which allies they would collaborate with. 🇺🇸

**Above: Challenge coin presented by the Hungarians.
Below: First Lieutenant Steven Toth with
Captain Fülöp (who wears the Hungarian peacekeeping
uniform, featuring the "hurricane" camouflage
pattern, developed for tropical regions).**



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEVEN TOTH

STEVEN TOTH
COLLECTION



Hungarian law enforcement plaque presented to First Lieutenant Toth from Major Szabó and Captain Fülöp.



STEVEN TOTH
COLLECTION

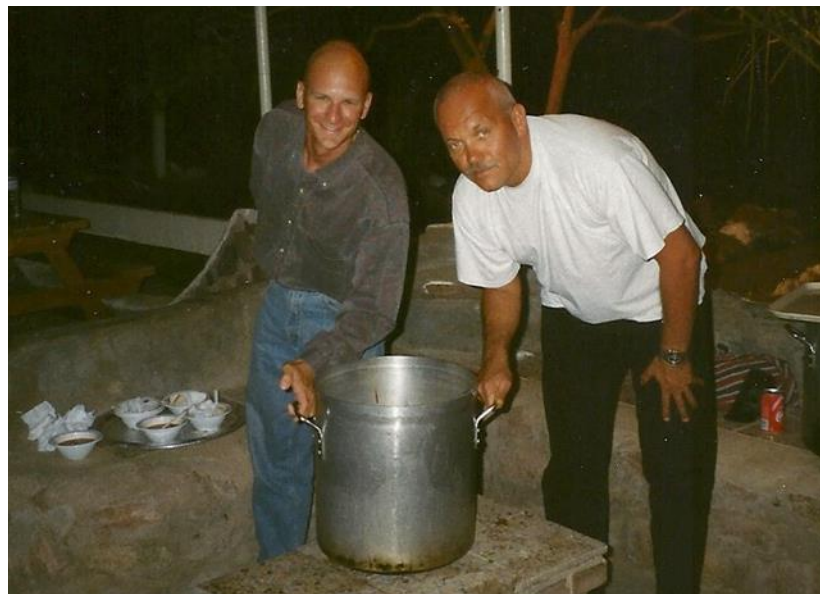
NATO/Hungary and Magyar Ejtőernyősök Bajtársi Szövetsége (Hungarian Paratrooper Comrades' Association) pins.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEVEN TOTH



STEVEN TOTH
COLLECTION

Hungarian Defence Forces arm insignia for duty uniform.



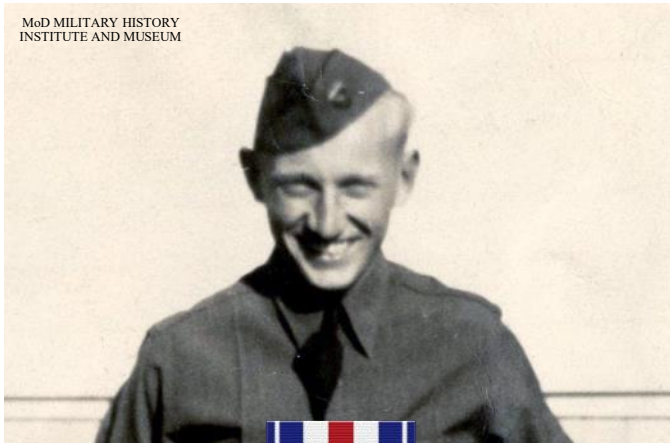
First Lieutenant Toth with Major Szabó - *gulyás* duty.

Sgt. Kovacs Earns the Silver Star

The Hungarian Military History Museum Preserves His Legacy

by Ferenc Bálint

MoD MILITARY HISTORY
INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM



Above: Albert Kovacs (1941) - Silver Star Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Service Medal, American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Theater Medal with three Battle Stars, three Service Stars, and arrowhead device, and World War II Victory Medal.

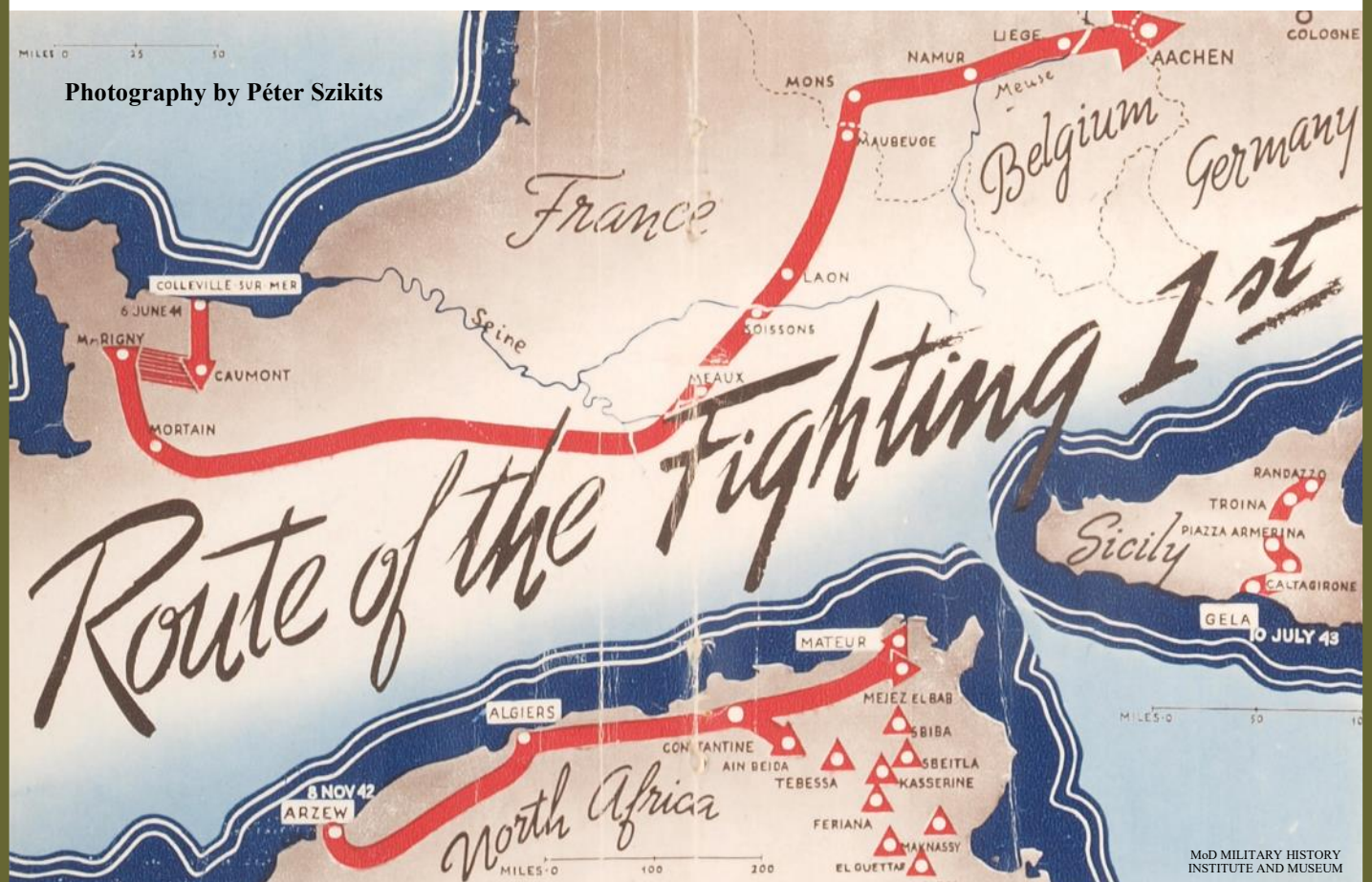
In 2014 the MoD Military History Institute and Museum received a package. In the cardboard box were uniforms, medals and documents - artifacts of a Hungarian-born WWII veteran of the U.S. Army, named Albert Kovacs. We did our best to reconstruct a picture of his life and military career with the help of his artifacts, documents, and online databases.

Albert Kovacs was born on April 17th, 1920. Sadly, his exact birthplace is unknown - according to his military file he was born in Czechoslovakia, shortly before the legalization of the Treaty of Trianon. His parents, Lajos and Marcella Kovacs immigrated to the United States sometime between 1920 and 1927 (his sister Grace already was born in America). The family lived in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

After grammar school Albert worked as a semi-skilled worker in a hat manufacturing company. On October 15th, 1940 he joined the US Army. Because he was under twenty-one, he needed parental permission for the military - the document (facing page), signed by his father and counter-signed by a Bridgeport police officer, was also in the box.

Albert was assigned to the Field Artillery, US Army

Continued on page 12...



MoD MILITARY HISTORY
INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

SS

South Norwalk, Conn.
(Place)

Oct. 4, 1940.
(Date)

We () the undersigned, being the: - FATHER - MOTHER - ~~GUARDIAN~~
of Albert Kovacs, a minor, an applicant for enlistment
in the UNITED STATES ARMY, do hereby give our consent to his enlistment therein. We () further certify that we are (~~are~~) not dependent upon him for support and that he is not married. We () have no objection to his assignment for Oversea Service.

The said Albert Kovacs was born on the 17 day of April
19 20, at Czechoslovakia, in the State of _____
(City, Town or County)
Country

Louis Kovacs.
Signature of father (if obtainable)
(If not, state reason)

Signature of mother (if obtainable)
(If not, state reason)

Signature of legally appointed guardian
(If both parents deceased)

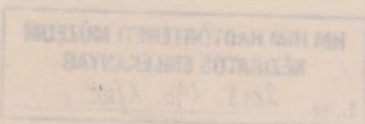
SEAL

G. J. Brophy
(Signature of witness)

Norwalk Police Dept
(Address of witness)

THIS CERTIFICATE SHOULD BE SWORN TO UNDER THE SEAL OF A NOTARY PUBLIC,
POSTMASTER, JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, OR REGULAR ARMY OFFICER IN HIS OFFICIAL
CAPACITY.

F-1-RPB-5-27-40-100M



C O N F I D E N T I A L

HEADQUARTERS 1ST U.S. INFANTRY DIVISION
APO 1, U.S. Army

5 February 1944

SUBJECT: Award of Silver Star.
THROUGH: Commanding Officer, 7th Field Artillery Battalion.
TO : Sergeant Albert Kovacs, Battery B, 7th Field Artillery Battalion.

1. Under the provisions of AR 600-45, 22 September 1943, Sergeant Albert Kovacs, 11019822, Battery B, 7th Field Artillery Battalion, is awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action.

2. The citation is as follows: For gallantry in action in the vicinity of El Guettar, Tunisia, 23 March 1943. When an exploding enemy bomb buried an enlisted man in his fox hole and set fire to several rounds of 105 mm ammunition near by, Sergeant Kovacs entered the gun pit in an unsuccessful attempt to rescue the imprisoned man but was forced to withdraw by exploding ammunition. His bold action merits the highest praise. Residence at enlistment: South Norwalk, Conn.

By command of Major General HUEBNER:

Leonidas Gavalas
LEONIDAS GAVALAS
Lt. Col., A.G.D.
Adjutant General



MoD MILITARY HISTORY
INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

C O N F I D E N T I A L

MoD MILITARY HISTORY INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

Below left:

Kovacs' Eisenhower, or "Ike" jacket features his rank stripes, "Big Red One" divisional patch, Honorable Service Insignia (above the right breast pocket), and the French Croix de Guerre *fourragere* (braided cord) awarded to the 1st Infantry Division as a unit decoration. On his lower left sleeve he wears six Overseas Service bars denoting three years of overseas service.

MoD MILITARY HISTORY
INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM



Above right:

His shirt with the addition of his ribbon bar.

Facing page: Kovacs' Silver Star medal and its citation, detailing the action that warranted its award.



MoD MILITARY HISTORY
INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

...continued from page 8

Philippine Department, but on November 1st, 1940 he was transferred to the 7th Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Infantry Division - the famous "Big Red One." The battalion was equipped with 105 mm guns. Unfortunately, we can't reconstruct the finer details of his wartime career, however, we can trace the movements of the 1st Infantry Division during the Second World War. The division landed in Algeria on November 8th, 1942 as part of Operation Torch, the invasion of French North Africa. The "Big Red One" was in combat in the Tunisian Campaign from January to May of 1943.

In the first day of the battle of El Guettar, Albert Kovacs - then already a sergeant - earned the Silver Star Medal, the third highest US Army decoration for gallantry in combat (the citation is pictured on page 10). The Silver Star was awarded to him February 5th, 1944, and the medal certificate was signed by Lieutenant Colonel Leondas Gavalas in the name of Lieutenant General Clarence R. Huebner, the commander of the 1st Infantry Division.

In July of 1943 the "Big Red One" participated in Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily. In the heavy fighting at the Battle of Troina, Kovacs's unit, the 7th Field Artillery Battalion, fired 9,565 shells during the seven-day engagement. Among the artifacts Kovacs preserved the *Soldier's Guide to Sicily* military booklet as the souvenir of the campaign.


In November the division went to England, to prepare for D-Day, and the division artillery was stationed in Piddlehinton, Dorsetshire. On D-Day they stormed Omaha Beach - the 7th Field Artillery Battalion with Sergeant Kovacs supported the 16th Infantry Regiment. In the first hours of combat the battalion lost most of its artillery pieces - but the gunners continued to fight as infantry.

After D-Day the 1st Infantry Division continued the fight. At the end of September they crossed the border of Germany, and participated in the siege of Aachen. After that the division was moved to a rear area for refitting and rest but were deployed again in the Battle of Bulge. After the failed German offensive, the "Big Red One" broke the Siegfried-line, crossed the Rhine, and finished the war in the territory of Czechoslovakia.

During WWII the 1st Infantry Division spent 443 days in combat, and suffered 21,023 casualties (killed, missing, and wounded in action). Due to continuous combat and the heavy casualties the soldiers of the division referred to themselves as the "Big Dead One" and "The Bloody First."

Sergeant Albert Kovacs was awarded the Bronze Star Medal on February 15th, 1945, honorably discharged and returned to Norwalk, Connecticut. He married in 1947, and had two daughters. He died on October 19th, 2013 at age of 93 in Sun City, Arizona.

Among the artifacts was Kovacs's dogtag, a leather belt, two garrison caps, three shirts, a tunic and a so-called "Ike jacket." Also, a scrapbook with various documents were included: an original June 6th, 1944 order of the day from General Eisenhower, and a *Pocket Guide to Germany Military* booklet.

In the scrapbook are various newspaper clippings: the news of Kovacs's Silver Star Medal, the battles of the 1st Infantry Division, and interestingly, some news of the Hungarian success at the 1952 Olympics. Finally, an obituary of another ethnic Hungarian US Army soldier, Private Adolph Andor Pirigyí. Private Pirigyí served in the 157th Infantry Regiment, 90th Infantry Division and was killed in action in France on July 10th, 1944 at the age of 33. He also lived in Norwalk, Connecticut - most likely he was a friend of Albert Kovacs. 

Support and promote our cause!



\$7.50*

MAGYAR FRONT LAPEL PINS

Available in gold (left) and antique gold (right).
(The bright gold version can be worn on the ribbon of the IHMHPS 2014-2018 Commemorative Cross.)

Shown actual size.



\$7.50*

IHMHPS 2014-2018 COMMEMORATIVE BADGE

(Left) Available by donation*
(any amount is appreciated).



Embroidered
insignia
\$5.00*



2008-2018
Badge
\$10.00*



*Donations and payments can be made via Paypal (czink@shaw.ca). Postage not included.



At the time of writing this most of the world is locked down and travel is impossible. But for the ravages of COVID-19 I would be enjoying the sunshine, culture and good food of Europe's, if not the world's, best buddies – Hungary and Poland. Instead I have been looking back on previous journeys which have taken me to a number of places where significant events have occurred and where the first shots were fired in what became two world wars.

In the first part of this article, or travelogue, I meander through Bosnia, Austria, Belgium and end surprisingly in Czechia on what cumulatively was my First World War tour. In the second part, which takes in the first shots of World War II, I have offered a list of museums I have had the opportunity to visit which the traveller with an interest in military history might consider including in their itinerary if they found themselves in their vicinity. I have not included any Hungarian destinations as I have assumed anyone not a native would be making a beeline to the absolutely splendid Military Institute and Museum in Budapest and perhaps the Museum of Aviation in Szolnok.

PART II

North to South: Gdansk – Danzig to the unreconstructed. Like many parts of Poland, Gdansk suffered enormous damage during WWII and the historic centre was largely rebuilt to resemble its pre-war beauty. Leaving aside its splendid architecture it has plenty to offer (not just the military history enthusiast) and has become one of my favourite places. Gdansk is also the administrative centre of the Pomeranian Voivodeship.

Although not a military history museum, a good place to learn about the city's unique position between the wars is the small and rather dated Museum of the Free City of Danzig. Even a short time there will afford a good background to the history of the city and especially to the tensions it caused between the newly established Republic of Poland and the Germans, who still formed a large majority of the population - as well as with successive governments of Germany.

Sometime around 05.40 hours of Friday, September 1st, 1939 the German pre-dreadnought battleship Schleswig-Holstein opened fire on Polish emplacements consisting of an arsenal, barrack block, and various bunkers and guard houses which had been established on the Westerplatte peninsula from 1923. The story is too long to tell here, but the first German assault failed and despite continued bombardment by German naval artillery, dive bombers and repeated infantry assaults, the 200 or so Polish defenders held out for seven days before surrendering to overwhelming odds. The second in command of the garrison was Captain Franciszek Dabrowski who was born in Budapest in 1904 (his parents moved to Krakow following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918). The heroic defence of Westerplatte has been the subject of two Polish movies

from 1963 and 2014, both of which are worth a watch if you come across them. The soldiers who participated in the defence are commemorated by a large monument erected on the highest point of the peninsula.

From Gdansk, the most interesting way to get to Westerplatte is by boat, although there is also a bus service. There is in the centre of the military encampment the ruin of what was the barracks. This consists of a two storey and basement shell with collapsed concrete beams. One can enter and walk around parts of what is left of the structure. Close by is a small museum in what was Guardhouse 1. One room is furnished to represent the living conditions of the time and the rest display some small arms and typical personal belongings of soldiers garrisoned there, as well as uniforms and biographical details of the commanders of the garrison. Outside the guardhouse are a couple of shells from the Schleswig-Holstein and a 20mm anti-tank gun.

All around the garrison area are information boards in both Polish and English telling the story of the events of September 1939 and more generally of the base and of Westerplatte's former glory as a seaside resort. There are various bunkers and ammunition dumps to see with some being fully accessible. I visited on a sunny May afternoon and dotted around were chaps dressed in uniforms of the time to provide more information to visitors. In addition to the monument commemorating the defence of Westerplatte there is a more intimate memorial to the soldiers who died during the fighting.

The Museum of World War II in Gdansk is in my opinion one of the best museums anywhere. It is purpose built and was opened in 2018. It is very logically set out and begins with the First World War and how that reshaped Europe.

One moves onto the rise of totalitarian regimes which is covered in film, a good few exhibits including many propaganda posters and a facsimile of a street in pre-war Poland lined with shop windows. The invasion and conquest of Poland and the horrors visited upon it and its people is sometimes graphically and sometimes symbolically represented. In between that there are hordes of exhibits of all kinds representing combatants and their weapons, equipment, and everyday objects. One of the more unusual features is a full-scale model of the front part of a Junkers Ju87 dive bomber emerging from a wall. There is no shortage of audio-visual and interactive devices providing information as one makes one's way through. The same pre-war street is finally depicted in its ruined form in 1945 complete with Soviet T34 tank. I have been there twice and a full morning or afternoon can easily be spent there. Audio guides are available in various languages.

A half hour train ride will take you to Gdynia which is the home port of the Polish Navy. There one can visit the ORP Blyskawica, a Grom Class Destroyer from WWII which sailed to the UK just before war broke out and served with the Polish Navy under the command of the British Admiralty during the war. She is one of a very small number of preserved destroyers. Almost all of the main deck is accessible and one can get close to the various guns and torpedo tubes. Inside are various exhibits reflecting life on board and her engagements. A short walk from the ship will take you to the Museum of the Polish Navy which has an outdoor exhibition of aircraft and naval artillery and indoors smaller items, some models, and art collection.

Finally, an hour on the train will take you to Malbork where you will find the largest castle by area in the world. It dates from the 13th century and makes for a very interesting day out. I have visited the city a number of times now. The historic centre is easy to negotiate on foot. It is well served by trams and buses for journeys beyond the old town. The local railway runs to Sopot and Gdynia.

Poznan is the administrative centre for and the largest city of the Voivodeship of Wielkopolska, or Greater Poland. In June 1956 the citizens of Poznan rose up against the Socialist regime and suffered the same fate as their friends in Hungary a few months later. A small but very full and well laid-out museum in the basement of the old Royal Palace sets out the history of this much less well-known revolt.

In the particularly lovely old town square there are two museums concerned with military matters. When I was there, the museum of the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918-1919 was closed for renovation. The small and rather tired, if not dull Military Museum of Greater Poland was open, but I am sorry to say is not particularly inspiring.

The main attraction is the Citadel. This is a huge fortified area constructed by the Prussians when Poznan was Posen. While much of the fortifications were destroyed in 1939 and 1945, many parts remain intact and house two branches of The Museum of Arms and the Poznan Army Museum. The former has a collection of Soviet aircraft formerly in service with the Polish Air Force, including an Ilyushin Il-28 bomber, as well as vehicles and artillery, including missiles and some tanks - all on display outdoors. Inside there is a

collection of uniforms worn by Polish soldiers from both world wars and between, together with some small arms. The latter is dedicated to the Polish defenders of the Citadel against German attack in 1939 and contains uniforms and artefacts from the siege. The Citadel is quite massive and a popular open space with the locals. There are also four forts that can be visited, one of which contains a museum dedicated to victims of the Nazi occupation of Poland during the war. I did not manage to get to these this time around, but Poznan is a place I am eager to return to.

Also within the Citadel is a large military cemetery, part of which is maintained by the Commonwealth Graves Commission and contains the remains of POWs from WWI imprisoned at a camp at Pila nearby. There are also graves, mainly of airmen whose aircraft were shot down, of those who died during WWII. Graves of Polish and Soviet soldiers surround the Commonwealth part and there are also monuments to resistance fighters and those whose lives were taken by the Socialist and Nazi terror machines. I visited on a very warm early November day just after All Saints Day, which is a national holiday in Poland. It is a Polish tradition of that day to visit the graves of departed relatives and to leave flowers and light lamps. I was very moved by the flowers and lamps which had been left on the graves of the Commonwealth servicemen, and indeed on many of the Soviet graves too.

There is also a Museum of Armour located in Poznan which at the time of my visit was located within a military base, but which now appears to have moved to civilian premises. The collection of around sixty armoured vehicles is the largest one in Poland.

Wroclaw is the administrative centre and largest city of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship and is famous for its gnomes, and for being a bit of a cultural hotspot. There is a small military museum at The Arsenal which it shares with an ethnographical exhibition. The most interesting feature (for me) was a long room exhibiting hundreds of helmets from almost every country dating from WWI to the present day. Just row after row of helmets and nothing but that. Beyond, there are some uniforms and weapons.

Warsaw is the capital city of Poland and amongst its many other attractions has two museums that will be of interest to the military historian and enthusiast. The Army Museum is next door to the National Museum. In the grounds surrounding the Army Museum there is an extensive display of aircraft used by the Polish Air Force including two Sturmoviks and a Petlyakov Pe-2 bomber, as well as MiGs, Sukhois and Yakovlevs of later vintage. There is also a large collection of tanks and other armoured vehicles, artillery and missile systems. The tanks and vehicles are mainly Soviet types but there are some wartime Allied and German vehicles too, and a couple of British post war tanks. The interior of the museum has an extensive and comprehensive permanent exhibition tracing the history of Polish arms from the middle ages to the present day. That part which covers the earlier years is a bit old fashioned in its layout and actually quite gloomy, but there has been quite an upgrade and refreshment of the exhibition rooms covering the 20th and 21st centuries which are much brighter and more

attractive to the modern eye.

At the Warsaw Uprising Museum one can see the genesis of the Gdansk Museum in concept and design. The most eye catching exhibit is a full scale facsimile of a B-24 Liberator bomber suspended from the ceiling. My recollection of my visit is rather hazy being none too well when I went, and should probably have not been out and about. I do recall feeling a sense of rage at the stories told of the treatment of the Polish people by the occupying forces so it must have been good.

Krakow is the second largest city in Poland and the administrative centre of the Voivodeship of Malopolska, or Lesser Poland and it is a tourist magnet. It has much to offer and has a very good tourist infrastructure. The National Museum in Krakow has a wing devoted to military history which rather replicates the scheme found in the Army Museum in Warsaw but without the outdoor exhibits of aircraft, artillery and armour. There is also a small museum dedicated to the Polish Home Army, the principal organ of resistance during the German occupation, which is not far from the railway station.

The highlight for me is the very good and extensive aviation museum about thirty minutes from the centre of the city by bus, and is highly recommended. Alongside the rows of Sukhois, MiGs and Lims (the Polish manufactured Soviet types) are a good few types which served in NATO air forces, such as a Belgian Mirage 5, a Portuguese LTV Corsair and an Italian Starfighter, as well as a SAAB Viggen and Draken. The museum's pride is the only remaining PZL P11, the gull winged fighter aircraft which was the principal fighter aircraft of the Polish Air Force in 1939 to survive the war. There is also a selection of civilian aircraft, helicopters, and gliders. Altogether a good day out of the city.

The Auschwitz/Birkenau concentration camps are located about an hour's drive from Krakow and a number of outlets provide well organised tours to there. Everyone able to do so should make this trip.

All of the above Polish cities have airports which connect to destinations within Europe by low-cost airlines and by LOT from Warsaw. All of the cities can be reached by international trains and from anywhere within Poland. Getting around Poland by train is not only easy, but very inexpensive, certainly by UK standards, even for first class. While most Polish trains are not terribly fast, I have always found them clean and comfortable and depending on the route, many carry a restaurant car. Purchasing tickets is easily done via the PKP website which can be navigated entirely in English. It is by far the easiest and most civilised way to get around the country. A lot of money is being spent on upgrading rolling stock and stations. All of the above cities have an historic old town, either original or reconstructed, which tend to be easily negotiable on foot. A dense system of trams and buses will get you to and from wherever you might be staying inexpensively. I have always felt very safe in Poland.

Prague has a rather fine aviation museum not too far from its centre at Kbely. Kbely is a functioning military air base and photography is restricted while outdoors. There was a bit of helicopter traffic while I was there which added to the interest of what the museum had to offer. As one would


expect there is no shortage of former Czechoslovakian Air Force MiG designs and other Soviet types. The Czech Lands were something of an industrial and technological powerhouse of the old empire and that included an aviation industry. Many types manufactured locally are represented - of particular interest is the collection of German models which Avia manufactured in modified forms after WWII, including the Avia S-99 (Messerschmitt Bf 109G) and Avia-92 (Messerschmitt Me 262). There is an example of the Avia B534 which was the principal fighter of the Czechoslovakian Air Force before the country was dissolved in 1939, and which type under Slovak colours sparred with Hungarian Fiat CR 32s during the recovery of the Felvidék. One highlight for me was the civilian Tupolev Tu104, which was the first Soviet jet airliner, in CSA colours.

Also worth a visit is the Czech Orthodox Cathedral of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the crypt of which houses a museum dedicated to the assassins of Reinhard Heydrich, who took refuge there following the assassination and where they were besieged. There is also a museum dedicated to the Czech Army but it has been so long since I have visited it my only real recollection, apart from an attractive interior, is the British Order of the Bath being described as the Order of the Spa.

While Prague Airport gets rave reviews and connects with many European cities and beyond, it is rather far out. Getting to and from Prague from within Europe can also be achieved by rail. Prague is well connected to other major European cities by train. The tram routes in Prague are extensive and it is also served by a number of underground lines, and it is cheap to do so. Day tickets are available for unlimited travel and represent good value. Prague is easy to get around and has a great deal to offer the tourist.

Bucharest was in a much better state than it was in 1981 when I first visited, and much more enjoyable. The National Military Museum was undergoing a renovation but most of it was still accessible. I was disappointed that the rooms containing the orders, decorations and medals collection were closed. In the small aviation section is a reconstructed example of an IAR-80 fighter aircraft, being an indigenous Romanian design, which entered service in 1941. There is an outdoor gallery of armour, vehicles, and artillery pieces the most interesting of which are a number of French tanks used by the Romanian army during WWII. There is also a very rusty German halftrack and an 88mm flak gun.

I have to confess I quite enjoyed Romania. Bucharest is quite chaotic but has so many beautiful buildings and churches. I took one highly recommended tour which lasted all day and took me to Peles Castle at Sinaia, which was the summer residence of the Romanian royal family, as well as to Bran Castle, which is said to have been an inspiration for Bram Stoker in how he imagined Dracula's castle, followed by a short stop in Brasov. I spent a few days in the beautiful city of Kolozsvár while in Romania. Romanian trains are very slow - I flew there with TAROM and was rewarded by the most spectacular views of the Carpathian Mountains.

In the meantime, while we can only dream of travels to come, I hope these recommendations might tempt you to put some of these places on your itinerary. 



FROM THE PIAVE TO THE DON, FROM THE DON TO THE DANUBE

The Military History of Hungary 1918–1945

Permanent exhibition
of the MoD Military History Institute and Museum

Open from 26 June 2021

NFI NEMZETI
FILMINTÉZET
MAGYARORSZÁG
FILMARCHÍVUM

1914
ESEMÉNYEK
CENTRÁLIUM
EMLEKBIZOTTSÁG
1920

 HADTÖRTÉNETI
INTÉZET ÉS
MŰZEUM