

MAGYAR FRONT

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Winter 2013

My Southern Hungary Campaign

Breathing new life through
the pages of history



ORINCAY COLLECTION - COLOURED BY PÉTER ORINCAY

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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.

A note from the Editor

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of our International Hungarian Military History Preservation Society members and their loved ones the very best for the holiday season, and good health and peace for the New Year.

Our *Magyar Front* gets better every year, and with each new issue, I am more impressed, not only with the quality of our offering, but with how we share our knowledge and experiences - and work so hard to bring so many obscure topics to light. Our day-jobs, family and social obligations easily fill our calendars, yet so many of us still find the time to work on IHMHPS projects and work out historical riddles. Our attention to technical details in such articles as featured in our "special helmet issue" is invaluable to the English speaking Hungarian militaria enthusiast, and contributes significantly to a broader understanding of the nuts-and-bolts of collecting and historical preservation.

Projects such as our examination of the uniforms of the Hungarian Diplomatic Corps elevate us to the top of our field of interest - providing information that has not been available anywhere else. Our recording and preservation of valuable photographic and document collections are a testament to our unselfish and useful role as a preservation society. This year we have donated many valuable items to the Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum and have played a key role in facilitating the repatriation of historically significant artefacts.



Péter Orincsay with
the Oszkár Klécsz al-
bums.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SÓFT ORINC SAY

This issue of the *Magyar Front* features the work of IHMHPS Scandinavia VP Péter Orincsay. Péter and his talent are no stranger to us, however, his adventure in the former Southern Hungarian territories make for exciting new reading and provides us with a spectacular visual smorgasbord.

Many of us are also collectors - whether it's militaria, or simply an accumulation of exciting historical lore. I have learned long ago (and it is constantly being reaffirmed) that it's not about *what* you have in your collection - it's about what you *do* with it. There is a fine line between collecting and hoarding, and a spectacular assortment of mementos hidden away in the back of a closet will create very little joy - but even a few modest pieces, when examined, researched and shared, will result in unprecedented happiness and enlightenment. Wisdom tells us that "*thousands of candles can be lit from a single one, and the life of the candle will not be shortened - happiness never decreases by being shared.*" I look forward to new projects and new discoveries by the IHMHPS, and thank you all for your honourable service to the Hungarian cause.

P.Cz.



**Our new, full-colour International Hungarian Military
History Society membership pins (shown actual size)
are available for \$5.00 (plus postage).**

by Péter Orincsay

My Southern Hungary Campaign

Kelebia-Tompa in 1941. "A light rain was falling on the Hungarian soldiers as they started to move towards the border. Rumours of the German advance were rampant among the troops, however, no one knew exactly what was to come in the hours ahead." István Szeverényi, 2012.

ORINC SAY COLLECTION

When I received that first email back in the spring of 2010 (from a military photograph collector) asking me if I would be interested in three Hungarian photo-albums, I could never have imagined that it would be one of those life-changing days.

Although I instantly realized their value and historical importance, I hesitated at the very high asking price. But after a few days, I realized that I mustn't pass-up this chance. Such a photographic collection needed to be cared for - and the joy I get from examining, studying, digitalizing and colourizing would make the price very worthwhile. I managed to raise the funds to buy the albums, and I soon received a huge box via express delivery.

These photo albums were compiled by Sergeant Oszkár Kléesz, and contain over 1400 original photographs made by him and his comrades of the Miklós Zrínyi 7th Infantry Regiment of Kecskemét. From the beginning, I intended to showcase these historically significant images. Sergeant Kléesz had made it easy for me since he arranged the pictures in chronological order and added detailed notes to each and every photo, giving a clear perspective of the history of the regiment. Using other reference books in conjunction with the albums, I learned so much about the regiment, its officers and their daily lives.

For the 70th anniversary of the 1941 reclamation of Délvidék (Southern Hungary) campaign, inspired my work on the second album so I could present it in the summer edition of the *Magyar Front*. As I gathered information, I

Below: Kelebia-Tompa in 2012.
Straight ahead along the road lays the Serbian border crossing today. This was where the soldiers passed as they received orders to advance, seventy-one years ago.

ORINC SAY PHOTO





A very historically significant photograph of the Miklós Zrínyi 7th Infantry Regiment in Kecskemét. It was taken behind the Franz Joseph barracks on the 26th of November, 1939, right after the consecration ceremony for the new regimental flag. The officers of the regiment are present, and include Officer's Gold Bravery Medal recipient László v. Duska (the left-most helmeted officer with moustache). The "flag mother" Mrs Béla Liszka, the second lady to the right of the flag, sitting next to her husband, the mayor of Kecskemét was also present.

ORINCSEY COLLECTION

accidentally stumbled upon the story István Szeverényi, the trumpeter of the Miklós Zrínyi 7th Infantry's regimental band. A fantastic coincidence occurred - I realized that I had been corresponding with a fellow named Ferenc Szeverényi for some years. He was an avid amateur photographer and had written me years ago and sent me some photos. We would exchange photos from time to time and enjoyed discussing them - I asked if he was related to trumpeter - and indeed he was - István Szeverényi was his father!

I sent him some of my photos from the Kléesz albums and waited for his reply. It came instantly and, and amazingly, I was also informed that his father enjoyed them as well! This was a great surprise for me - an actual living eyewitness to what went on in my album's photographs. I kept sending scans to Ferenc and his father, and he sent me his photos from the same places in Kecskemét, as they looked today. I pin-pointed the locations on digital maps compare the old with the new images.

István Szeverényi's personal recollections from the 1941 Délvidék campaign, together with my album photos, inspired Ferenc to contact a friend of his in the former Délvidék, today in Serbia, to organize a day-trip. In the spring of 2012 he took his father back to the sites of the 1941 campaign, and to the places that were pictured in Sergeant Kléesz album photos. The trip exceeded all expectations, and the photos I received were simply amazing. It was haunting to see that not much has changed over the past seventy years, and that some sites are almost exactly the same today. The excitement

the photos created in today's Serbia, among Ferenc's Hungarian friends, was also quite remarkable. Many people there helped to locate the places now, once again in the forefront of our minds. "Oszkár bácsi was indeed a great photographer," Ferenc often said.

The immense positive reaction and interest that my scanned photos had caused made me even more determined that I should travel to these places myself, and meet all the fantastic people that made it all possible. I felt that the land István Szeverényi, sergeant Oszkár Kléesz - and my own grandfather, helped return to Hungary in 1941 was there waiting for me, and I felt that I must pay a visit.

It was already dark when I arrived in Kecskemét by train. The air was still warm, although August was over and September had just begun. Ferenc Szeverényi, my old "pen pal" greeted me as I stepped out into the Kecskemét evening at the old train station. We had never met before, but both Ferenc and the town of Kecskemét were already very familiar to me. Ferenc had planned for my arrival long in advance, and had paid attention to every detail. He knew all about my many hundreds of hours work with the Kléesz albums, and that I was familiar with most of the sites in Kecskemét. At the Szeverényi house, Ferenc explained the schedule for the days to come, and we talked late into the night over chicken *pörkölt* his lovely wife had prepared.

The next morning we started the day by visiting the Kecskemét Arborétum (tree park) where Sergeant Kléesz visited in the early spring of 1940 for a course in military

A building by the Zombor - Szabadka railway, where Kléesz and his men encountered the first Yugoslav soldiers. The Hungarian name of the village is Babapuszta, but during the Second World War the village was named Fernbach by the relocated Hungarian Székely people who came there after 1941.



ORINCAY COLLECTION

field geography. The old chapel stood there just like in the photos in his album. Ferenc's father István waited for us at his apartment just a few blocks away, and it was indeed a pleasure to meet the old veteran of the Délvidék, as well as the Eastern Front Don River campaigns. We spent some hours talking together, and then Ferenc took us on a tour of the old regimental barracks of Kecskemét (page 4).

István took me to the old Horthy barracks where he was stationed while doing his service in the regimental band. As the old memories returned, I could see how moved he was as we walked up the few stairs of the barracks. Today, the building houses a bank and rental offices. The old Franz Joseph barracks that housed the Miklós Zrínyi 7th Infantry Regiment command staff is today the Zoltán Kodály School of Music. This was the place where Lt. Col. József Grassy received a visit from the Soviet military attaché in Oszkár Kléesz's photos. The back yard now has houses built on it, but the round window on the main building is still visible, where the officers of the Miklós Zrínyi 7th Infantry Regiment are gathered for a group photo after the flag consecration ceremony in September of 1939.

To my great surprise, another very special event was booked for that afternoon. At the Katona József Emlékház (the house of the famous Hungarian playwright and poet József Katona was born), the historian and main supervisor of the Kecskemét Historical Museum, Ilona Székelyné Körösi, together with vice-mayor of the city, Kornél Mák, was waiting for me. Also present at the site were some jour-

Below: Aleksa Šantić in 1912. This small village was actually founded by Serb World War I veterans who settled here after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, and was named in 1924 after the Bosnian-Serb poet Aleksa Šantić.

ORINCAY PHOTO





Commander of the Miklós Zrínyi 7th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Frigyes v. Vasváry, leaves the Bácskossuthfalva City Hall in April of 1941.

ORINCAY COLLECTION

Below: Bácskossuthfalva in 2012.
The area in front of the City Hall is a quiet place to leave your bicycle and take the bus to Novi Sad (Ujvidék), Sombor (Zombor) or Subotica (Szabadka). This village has a Hungarian ethnic majority.

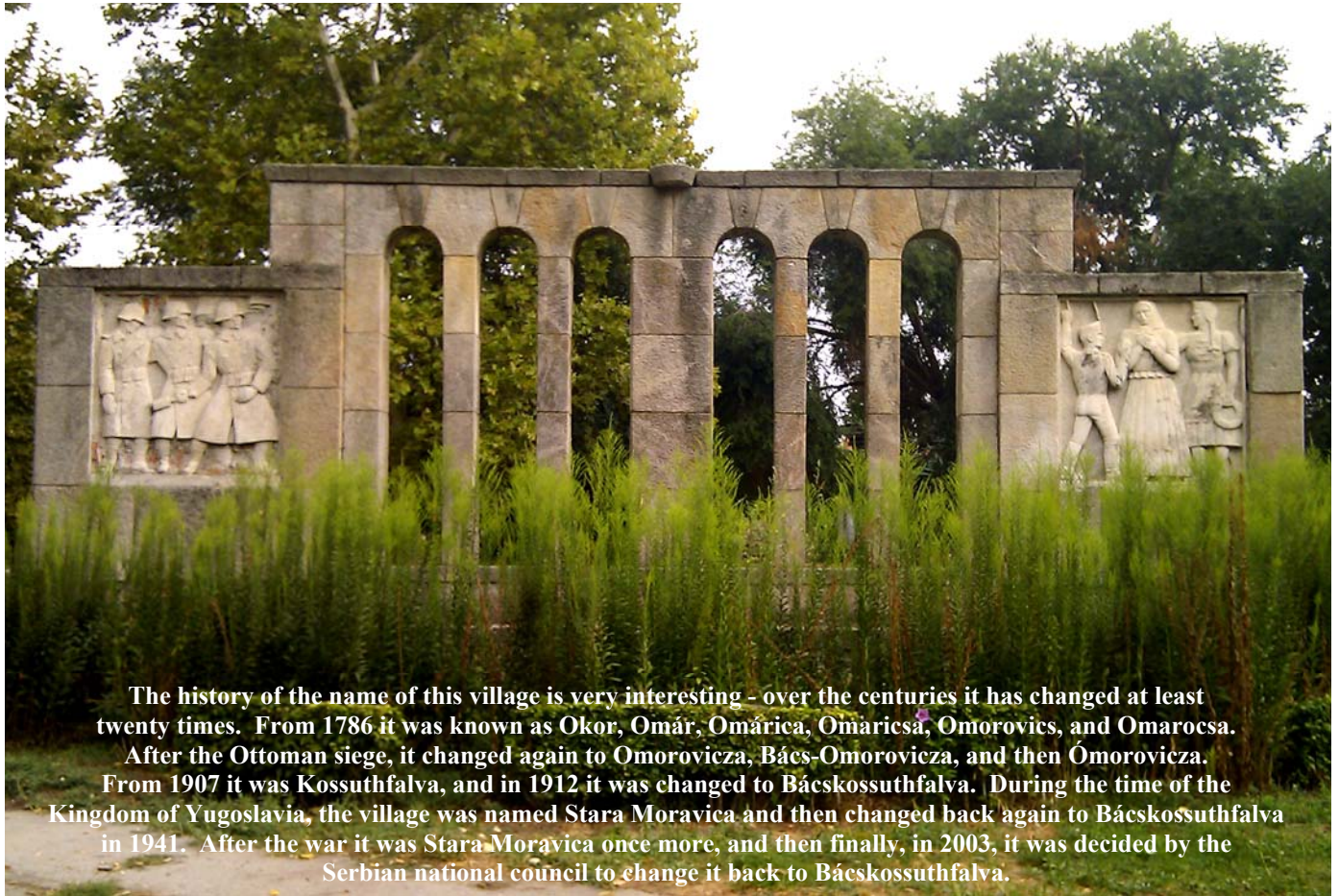
ORINCAY PHOTO



nalists from the local newspapers and Kecskemét TV. I had told Ferenc well before my departure that I wanted to present a copy of my scanned photographic material to the local museum in the name of the IHMHPS. I have always felt that my material didn't only belong to me as a collector, but also to anyone interested in Hungarian military history - and of course to the city of Kecskemét. So they decided to turn my presentation of my gift into a ceremony! I was very pleasantly surprised and overwhelmed as I explained my intentions, both in the TV interview (the first one I have ever done), as well as for the people and journalists that had come for this event. Later that evening I was thrilled to see myself on the Kecskemét TV news.

In the early morning on the next day, we set out for the long journey down to Serbia and Délvidék. We left Kecskemét while it was still dark and headed south towards the Serbian border. I had prepared many prints from the album photos that I was likely to see for real - I had many photos sent to me by Ferenc, but this time I would see it all for myself.

The first stop that we made was an hour and a half later, just outside the small border village of Tompa. This was the place where Oszkár Kléesz and his unit had stood in the cold morning rain in April of 1941, just before crossing the border into Serbia. As we walked towards the intersection where the soldiers passed on the way toward the nearby border, I instantly recognized the place (as well as the correct angle) that Kléesz took his photos from. Being a non-



ORINCSAY PHOTO

The memorial of the fallen soldiers of World War I in Bácskossuthfalva.

ORINCSAY PHOTO



ORINCSAY PHOTO





Bácsfeketehegy in 1941. The mainly Hungarian village had a large German population at this time. The German ethnic organization was called the Volksbund, and this building housed its local office.

ORINCAY COLLECTION

Below: Feketić in 2012.
The old building stands along the main road,
and has not changed, and even the flagpole
is still in place. Today, the building is empty except
for the local hardware store on the ground floor.

ORINCAY PHOTO



Serbian/Hungarian citizen, I wasn't allowed to use that border crossing, so we had to drive another 30km to Subotica (formerly Szabadka), and use the international one (in 1941, Sergeant Kléesz didn't have this kind of problem).

We headed back to the Serbian side of the crossing where Kléesz had crossed and to the village of Aleksa Šantić. In 1941, the same village was called Babapuszta in Hungarian, and this was the place Kléesz and his unit first encountered the Royal Yugoslavian Army. In front of the small railway building the first prisoners of war were taken by the Hungarians, and Sergeant Kléesz was there with his camera. The building looks the same today, and nothing has changed except for one door being covered over. The railway line between Sombor and Subotica passes through here and time stands still. We continued our trip as Kléesz did - south in the direction of Pacsér. The Hungarian units that entered Pacsér were fired upon by snipers positioned in the village church tower. We passed the church and the Yugoslav World War II memorial quietly. One of Ferenc's friends who lives in Pacsér had found the old road that led to the town - recognizing it from one of the old photos. We passed the place and made a quick photo stop, then continued to the next town just south of Pacsér. Bácskossuthfalva is a town with an 85% Hungarian population, and it is there that the commander of the Miklós Zrínyi 7th Infantry Regiment, vitéz Frigyes Vasváry, is passing the crowds on his way out of the town hall in one of Kléesz's photographs.

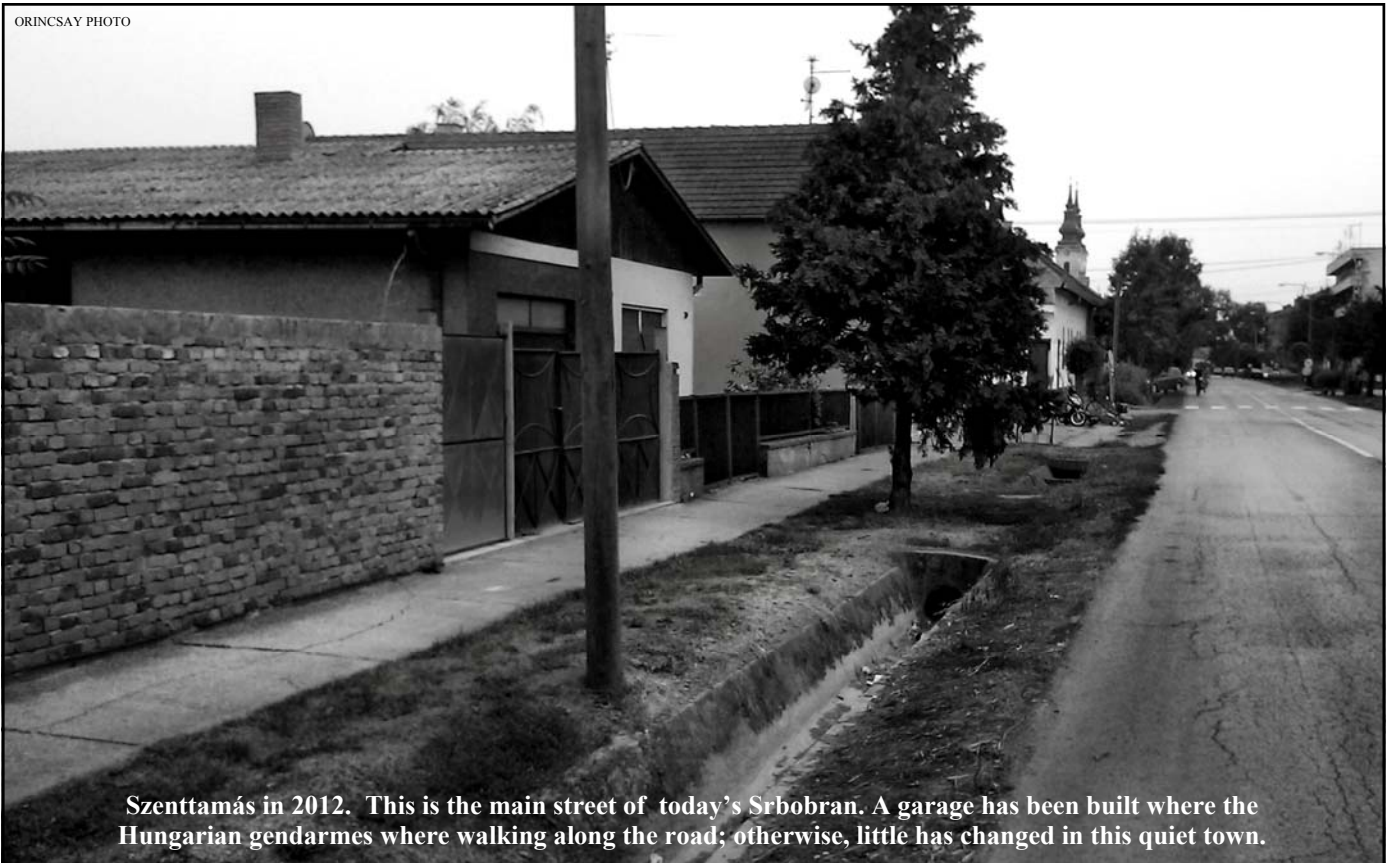
Today, the town hall flies the Serbian flag, and the road is



Szenttamás in April 1941. While on horseback Sergeant Klées captures the two Hungarian gendarmes on patrol. The traces of the previous days' fighting are visible on the facades of the houses.

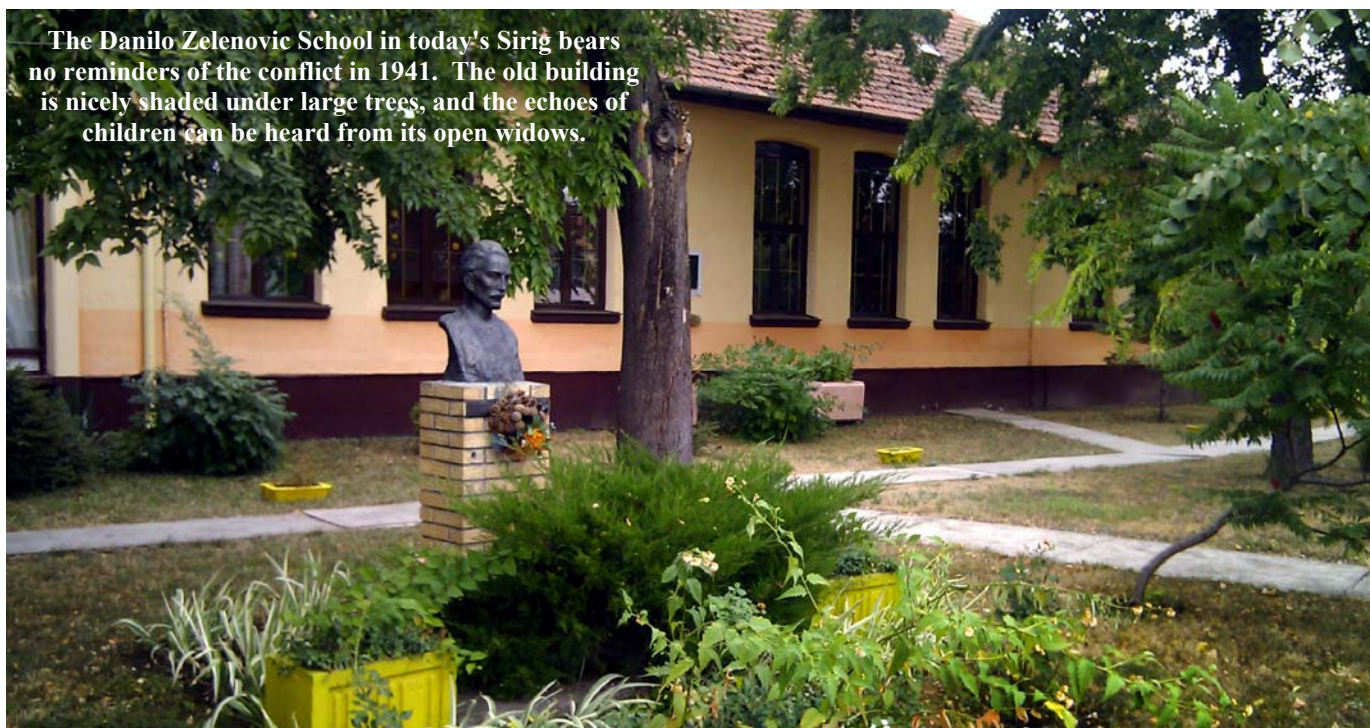
ORINCAY COLLECTION

ORINCAY PHOTO



Szenttamás in 2012. This is the main street of today's Srbobran. A garage has been built where the Hungarian gendarmes were walking along the road; otherwise, little has changed in this quiet town.

The Danilo Zelenovic School in today's Sirig bears no reminders of the conflict in 1941. The old building is nicely shaded under large trees, and the echoes of children can be heard from its open windows.



ORINCSEY PHOTO

paved, but that's pretty much all that has changed since 1941. We took a stroll in the centre of Bácskossuthfalva and I immediately noticed an old plinth, or foundation – a part of the local World War I monument. We met up with the local historian and friend of Ferenc, László Papp, and he told us all about it. This example was erected in the inter-war period by the Hungarians in Bácskossuthfalva, as a memorial of the fallen soldiers from this community. After the war as Bácskossuthfalva once again became Yugoslavia, the new authorities ordered a local (Hungarian) bricklayer to cover over the murals on the plinth since it was deemed “a relic of fascism.” He did his work, and it was covered up for many years. As the years went by, and pride in the locals' Hungarian heritage was no longer officially frowned upon, the town council decided to try to remove the old bricks and mortar. As it turned out, all that was needed was a single hammer blow, and the very lightly cemented covering crumbled – revealing all of the original details of the monument's foundation, which had been beautifully preserved by the careful Hungarian bricklayer for so many years.

We continued our trip further south, and along the way we passed a number of old wartime Yugoslav pillboxes that were hastily built for a possible Hungarian invasion. These defences were never of much use since the Germans started the 1941 invasion from the air, with the bombing of Belgrade a week before the Hungarian army entered Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav army was breaking up by the time the Hungarians passed the fortifications, and they remain in the fields as reminders of the past. Ferenc told me that one of them wasn't completely abandoned – it was inhabited by a family of foxes in the spring.

The next stop was Feketic (Feketehegy). Sergeant Kléesz was greeted here by the local German population back in 1941, at which time over 80% of the inhabitants were German. They welcomed the Hungarians as liberators just as

the Hungarian people did. Many of the Kléesz photographs from the villages showcase the festive and friendly attitudes of the local Germans, many of whom were killed or expelled after the war by the new Yugoslav authorities.

Further south we came to the town of Srbobran (Szenttamás). In one of Kléesz's photos the Hungarian gendarmerie can already be seen patrolling the streets as they entered. Today, the main street through Szenttamás looks exactly like it did in the Kléesz photo of the two patrolling *Csendör*, and the exact spot was easy to find.

The house on Gavriló Princip Street that has the gaping grenade hole on the same photo, is still there, and the hole is covered over, however, the war damage is still clearly visible. A bit further down the main road is the Szenttamás Orthodox church with its twin towers. This was the spot from where the sniper fire came on the advancing Hungarian troops. A 40mm Bofors gun fired back, leaving more gaping holes. None of that can be seen today, and the church is well maintained.

The last stop on our way to the south was the town of Sirig. As Sergeant Oszkár Kléesz passed this village, he was met by the still-smoking ruins of houses and buildings - the evidence of battle was everywhere. Sirig was an almost entirely Serb populated village that was founded as late as 1926, and became a place of fierce resistance against the advancing Hungarian army and many local Sirig residents lost their lives.

Passing through Sirig in 2012 was far more quiet for me

Right: “Two images in my collection are particularly interesting, since Sergeant Kléesz and my grandfather had taken photos of the same building. My grandfather's negative's sleeve notes, labeled it as a school building, and Kléesz referred to it as the local school house.”

Péter Orincsey

Photograph by Sergeant Oszkár Kléesz



Photograph by Captain László Orincsay



than for both Sergeant Kléesz and my own grandfather, Captain László Orincsay. The 1941 Délvidék campaign was the first actual one where the resistance towards the Hungarian troops was severe. In comparison with the 1938 Felvidék (Upper Hungary/Slovakia) and the 1940 Erdély (Transylvania) campaigns, the troops must have been very stunned by what they saw in Sirig since both of them took many photos. Two images in my collection are particularly interesting, since Sergeant Kléesz and Captain Orincsay had taken an almost identical photo of the same building. I had learned from my grandfathers negative's sleeve notes, that it had been a school building, and from Kléesz's albums that it was the local school house.

I looked for it as we passed through the small village, now with a population of just over 3000 and located on the road south of Srbobran in the direction of Novi Sad (Újvidék). I began to feel that the school house as I had pictured it was nowhere to be found as we passed the last house in the village. As we turned around, I saw the familiar structure pictured in my old photos! There was a new addition built in front of the old entrance to that old school house, and today it still serves the same purpose: the Danilo Zelenovic School, with classes up to the 8th grade. As I walked around it, I was invited in by a parent who probably wondered what I was doing there. No one could speak English in the principal's office, so I couldn't explain myself, but Principal Biljana Duricic and her office staff offered me a cup of coffee anyway. Unfortunately, I only remembered afterwards that I had my grandfather's photo of their school on my mobile phone!

After Sirig we headed up north again, and stopped for lunch at a roadside restaurant, while my head swirled with all of this input. The images of the old photographs that I had spent countless hours of scanning mixed with the new ones I was seeing with my own eyes. I couldn't put my thoughts into words, so I just quietly savoured the excellent food and the sublime experience as it unfolded. It started to rain, and I looked out into the yard outside the restaurant and saw an old carriage, a part of the décor, just like the one that Sergeant Kléesz and his men used in many of the photographs.

After lunch, we headed back to Bácskossuthfalva where we would meet local historian László Papp once again. We met him and his wife at his home and had a long talk on their patio. He told me that when the Hungarian troops entered Bácskossuthfalva in 1941, his mother, as a young girl, had recited a poem written especially for the occasion – which he still had! He promised to email it to me as soon as he found it. But we were in for an even a bigger surprise. László had found one of the houses from the photos, and knew the elderly lady who lived there. I immediately asked if we could go there and show her the photos I had brought with me – in no time we were driving up the old and narrow back streets of Bácskossuthfalva to get to her house.

Piroska Heiler opened the gate as we arrived, and told us how she had lived there for 85 years. László explained to her about me and my photos, and when she saw the enlarged photo from the album taken outside her house, she pointed at the sergeant and cried: "*Hát, ez Kléesz Oszkár!*" ("That's Oszkár Kléesz!") She recognized him immediately, along


with the other women who stood in front of the house. She started with her mother Mária (5th from left), Mária Béke, Júlia Béke (with the ham) and Rozália Boldog. She said that she couldn't recognize the woman next to her mother, until she took a closer look - then she shouted that it was her!

Piroska then told us about those days of happiness back in April of 1941, when her hometown of Bácskossuthfalva was liberated by the Hungarian army. She was only fourteen years-old as she, together with her family, welcomed the Hungarians after the Yugoslav army had left some days before. It was at Easter when the troops from Kecskemét were housed by local residents. She recalled: "*I was almost asleep in the evening when there was a knock on our door. Sergeant Kléesz and his men would be staying at their house, and were welcomed in by my mother. He was a tall very good looking soldier, and he got to stay in our finest room.*" She pointed at the front room facing the small street; "*That was Oszkár Kléesz's room!*"

His men stayed in the back, she said. "*They only stayed here a couple of days, but I remember him well, even though I was only fourteen at the time. Now I'm old and alone, the house is in poor condition and I don't have any means to repair it anymore.*" Piroska was happy to see us and wanted to know why someone would come all the way there from Sweden. I found myself at a loss for words - a brief explanation just seemed impossible. That moment was both fantastic and tragic at the same time, and even when I think about it now I am filled with emotion. It was late in the afternoon, and my travel companions are signalling me that it's getting late and we have to depart. I embraced Piroska and gave her the enlargements I brought. In those pictures were the moments she had cherished back in 1941, so I thought it best to leave them there with her.

For a long time, I sat quietly in the car. I couldn't bring myself to say anything at all. The images and emotions overwhelmed me, and I knew it would take a while to sort everything out. I will go through all of my images again, and thoroughly process it all. I did leave with great memories and a deeper understanding of the men – and women - who took part in the Délvidék campaign.

What took us a day, took a couple of weeks for the Hungarian troops who passed along these roads. We were met with friendly hospitality, despite the challenges with language. Sergeant Kléesz is more than just a ghost from an album in my militaria collection. He still exists - in the memory of Piroska, and in the hearts of anyone who will encounter him through our little presentation of the 1941 Délvidék campaign. He left behind much more than just photographs. Seventy-one years after he snapped those pictures, he inspired Ferenc and his friend, in today's Délvidék, to give me a day I will never forget.

It was getting dark as we crossed the border into Hungary again. The autumn night was colder, and after a quick coffee-break we drove the hour and a half back to Kecskemét. It was a busy day that seemed to pass in a moment, and there was no lack of inspiration and excitement – we were ready to do even more research! And then, with great joy I remembered - I still have one of Sergeant Kléesz's albums that I haven't scanned yet! 



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Above:

Bácskossuthfalva in 1941.

Piroska Heiler (third from left) together with her mother and neighbours pose for a photograph outside her family home.

Oszkar Kléesz and his men where stationed at her house for a few days during Easter of 1941.

Right:

Piroska Heiler never forgot about Oszkar Kléesz and his men. Here she's looking at a photo of herself (an enlargement I made from one of the Kléesz albums) at the age of fourteen.

"Hát, ez Kléesz Oszkár!"
("That's Oszkár Kléesz!")



ORINCAY PHOTO



A remarkable photo of Sergeant Oszkár Kléesz carefully working on the very photograph albums which are the subject of this issue of the *Magyar Front*, while his comrades read, write letters, and catch up on the latest news.

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Left: Péter Orincsay on local Kecskemét TV:
“It was an interesting and unusual experience - the importance of Oszkár Kléesz’s photographs really came to life for me at that moment.”

I chose to take black and white photos to go with this issue of the *Magyar Front* because I can take the photographs and develop (and scan) the film myself.

I feel that black and white images allow the viewer to focus on objects and details more thoroughly, without the distraction of colour.

My camera is a Hasselblad 500/cm with a 50mm lens – it’s old-school and very familiar to me – it’s analogue, with twelve

frames on each roll, which lets me focus on and perfect each frame. A digital camera would have only left me with a couple of hundred mediocre pictures - photography is still an art which I love to explore and share.

I’m often asked for tips about improving cherished photographs which are damaged and faded, so here are a few very basic tips:

Always scan your old photos in a way that all the details will be good and visible, but try not to make any contrast changes in the initial scanning.

Next, work on the contrast and remove all the damage. This can be done in many ways, and in many different photo editing programs. Also cropping the photo and rotating it is best done with your photo editor rather than in the scanning program.

Make sure that you have your monitor correctly calibrated to achieve best results. If you use Photoshop or any professional photo editing programs, there are countless tips and suggestions on how to work further with your images, however, a basically good scan and some adjustments in contrast, can give your old photographs new life!

Péter Orincsay

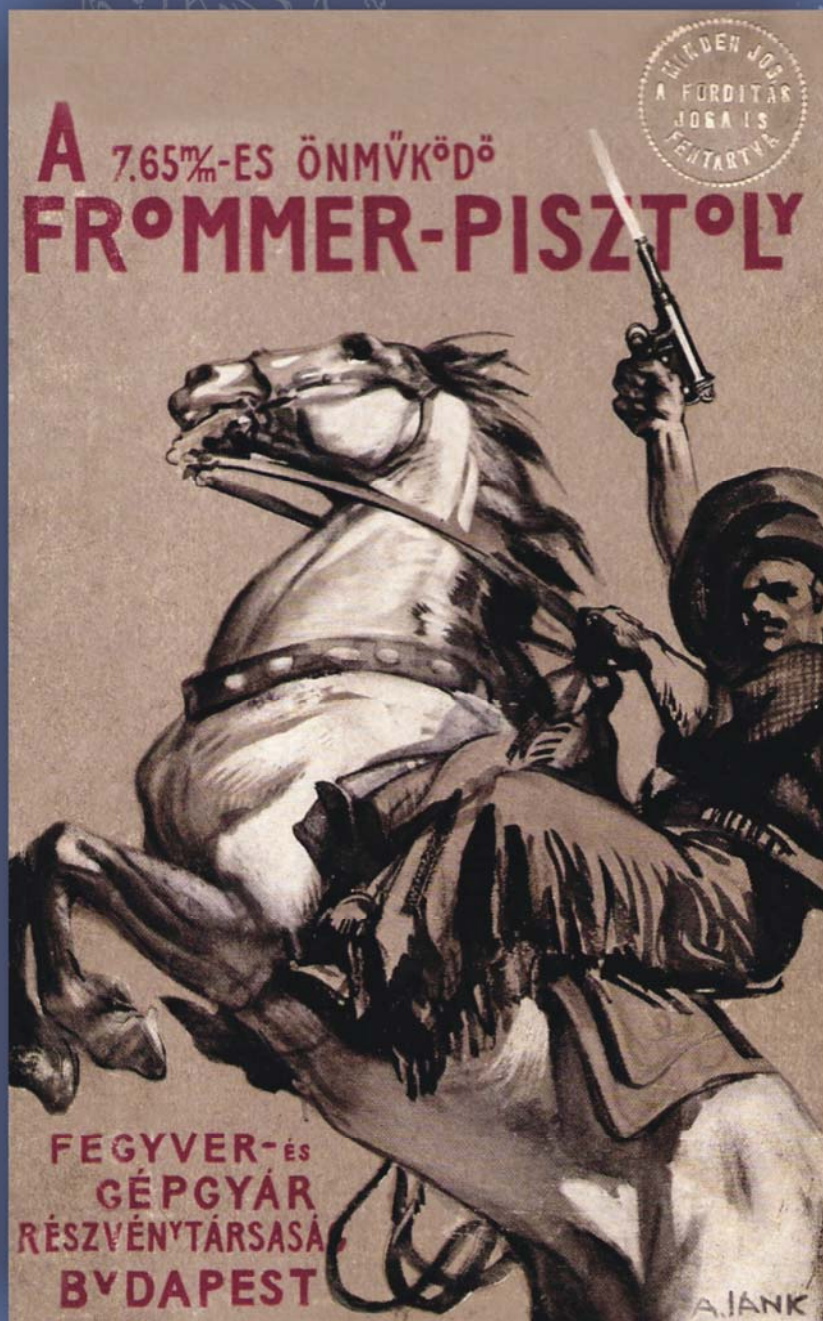


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A tervasztaltól a harcmezőig - a magyar kézfegyverek 100 éve

*From the drawing board to the battlefield
The 100 years of the Hungarian small arms*



Kiállítás
a HM Hadtörténeti Intézet
és Múzeum
földszinti kiállítótermében

New exhibition
in the Military History Institute
and Museum
Location: exhibition hall
of ground floor

Megtekinthető 2011. november 16-tól

Opening Date 16 November 2011

Anton Gloster

by Max Georgin



HADTÖRTÉNETI
INTÉZET ÉS
MÚZEUM