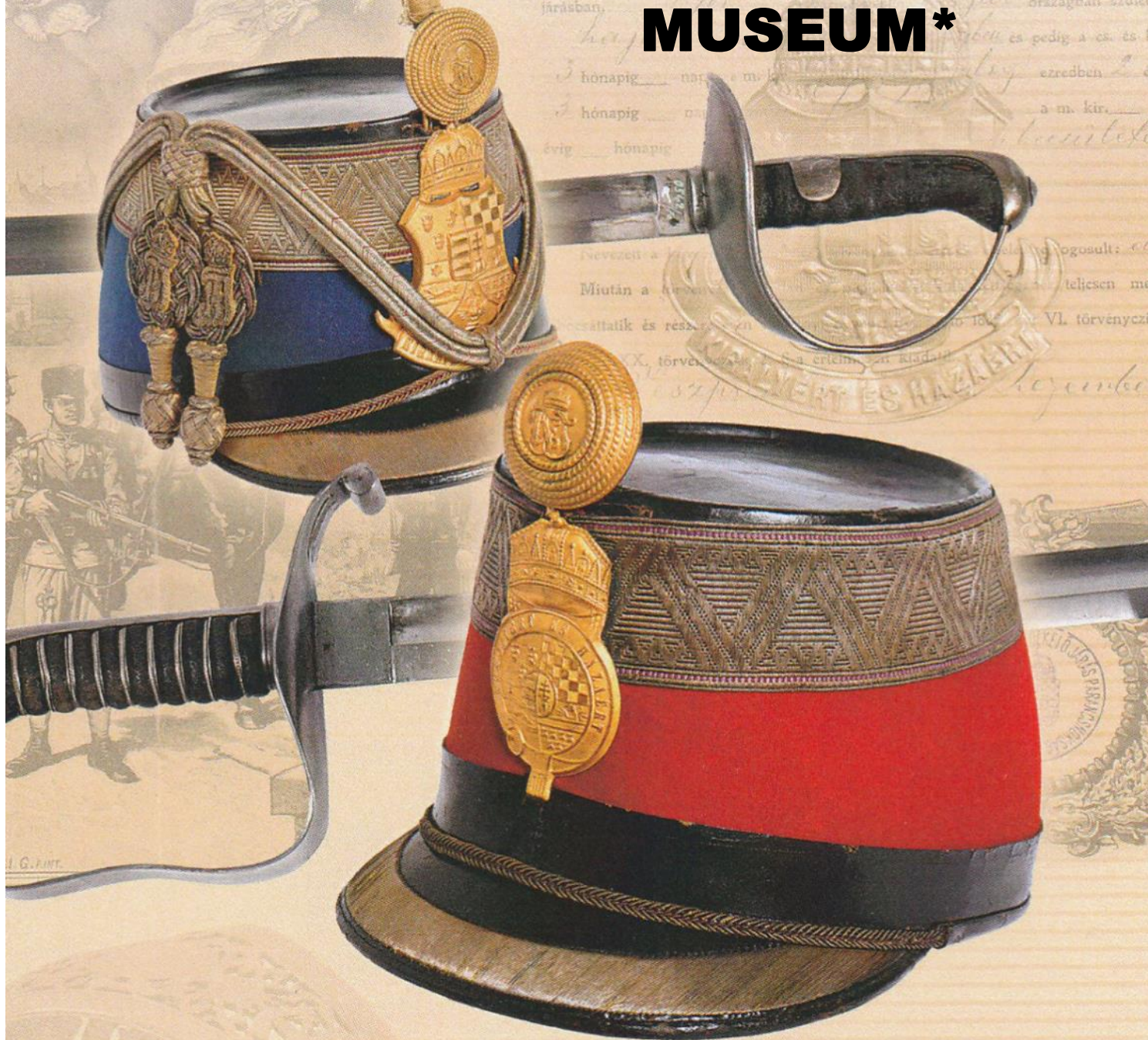


# MAGYAR FRONT

Vol. XXV, No. 3

SUMMER 2023

## POSTCARDS FROM OUR FAVOURITE MUSEUM\*



\*1918-2023



## *A note from the Editor*

The Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum in Budapest closed on May 21st, 2023. It's not the first such institution in Hungary to suffer - the Museum of Applied Arts (Iparművészeti Múzeum) has been closed since 2018, the Museum of Transportation (Közlekedési Múzeum) closed its doors in 2016, and both the Hungarian Museum of Natural Sciences (Magyar Természettudományi Múzeum) and the Hungarian National Gallery (Magyar Nemzeti Galéria) have been diminished in size.

The Military Museum's exhibitions have been dismantled and their artifacts put in storage, however, as of August of this year a five-room exhibition opened in the Szent István Király Museum in the city of Székesfehérvár (a larger one is planned for next spring). In addition, the Hungarian Ministry of Defence has set up a recruiting exhibition (with some museum artifacts) in Budapest's "Bálna" – an ultra-modern, already obsolete shopping mall/convention centre that could never be taken seriously as a museum space.

After learning about this, I did my best to look into the reasons for such a seemingly irresponsible mishandling of an important public collection, and sent off inquiries to half a dozen Ministry of Defence representatives. I've never had much success in establishing communication with Hungarian government officials, however, I flattered myself into believing that this time I might have some luck – I have been an outspoken supporter of the MoD's museum for a couple of decades, and have donated artifacts of my own, as well as having facilitated the donation of a number of significant collections. To date I haven't received a single response - I suppose I shouldn't expect such important people to care about one broken-hearted Canadian-Hungarian.

Official statements about the move from the MoD are vague, but journalists seem to point their fingers at the minister himself - Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, and the desire for his ministry to set up office in the space of the former museum in Budapest's historic Castle District (that part has now been achieved).

I can understand the need for upgrading and expanding the museum – outdoor space for vehicles and other considerations would certainly warrant the dialogue that I know has been going on for some time; but closing such a venerable institution without any concrete plan for its future whereabouts is unfathomable.

I can't imagine how the museum's staff feel about this – some of whom have dedicated their entire working lives there. They are faced with uncertainty which I am sure is shared by their spouses and families. But I can very clearly share how I feel about it – as just one fan of the place since my childhood. I have been there three times as an adult, and it became one of the highlights of our trips to Hungary. And there's more to it – something kind of miraculous, in my opinion. In a world where things like customer service (or service of any kind for that matter) seems non-existent, members of the staff of the museum not only patiently (and consistently) helped me with my innumerable questions about Hungarian military history, they actually became responsible for whatever successes I can claim today as an amateur military historian. When I first entered their doors, I was a complete beginner, and today I feel I can consider myself a person who has not just consumed their knowledge (and kindness), but that I have also contributed in a small way to the study, awareness, and understanding of Hungarian military history.


The work of these museologists will only be more difficult with the collections in warehouses. Museums the world over already have difficulty attracting visitors – if a public collection isn't even accessible by the public, how can it be of any service to interested persons? How much anxiety would that heap on the shoulders of any member of the staff, or on anyone dedicated to the preservation of Hungarian military history?

I would have felt a little better if the Ministry of Defence answered me with some positive reassurance of the museum's future – but instead it has joined my list of modern day entities that offer so little, and inspire nothing. If anyone out there can suggest anything I can do to help, I hope I'll hear about it – for that beloved museum I am always ready to work hard and to help, to "remember and remind," just like its inspirational and dedicated staff.

*P.Cz.*

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**Our cover: *Honvéd* M1891 hussar officer's and M1869 infantry officer's shakos; *KuK* M1875 hussar other ranks and M1861 infantry officer's sabres. Postcard from the Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum issued in 2017, featuring images captured by Péter Szikits and designed by Imre Benedek.**



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**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

**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

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Fighter's Association, and was  
published from the early 1930s until  
the end of the Second World War.



## *Military History Institute and Museum Photographer Péter Szikits Receives Our Badge of Honour*

Every Magyar Front reader will be familiar with the work of Péter Szikits – even though his name usually appears in small print under photographs. He's the Hungarian Military History Museum's photographer, and he's been documenting their collections for almost a quarter of a century. He also captures events such as opening ceremonies and conferences.

His images have illustrated several books and publications, and even our periodical has been honoured with his work numerous times.

Prior to working at the museum, he travelled the country as a photographer for the Office of Monument Protection, photographing castles, manor houses and churches. His work is preserved in the photo gallery there and in numerous publications.

After so many years Péter feels that he has already photographed and archived practically all the Hungarian Military History Museum's artefacts, however, statistics show that only about 30% has been done. It looks like he'll be busy for the next quarter of a century at least!

The IHMHP is honoured to present this talented and dedicated photographer our Badge of Honour.





# The Military History Museum

by Ágnes Makai and Emese Szoletzky

(Originally published in *100 Years of the Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum, 2018.*)



Hungarian National Museum and its building. The Hungarian Diet also put this issue on its agenda, and, by resolution, it also supported the foundation of a distinguished Hungarian military historical collection. The Millennium of the Hungarian Conquest in 1896 considerably accelerated preparations. The military historical committee of the Millennium exhibition turned to the competent authorities at the outset and requested them to keep together the military historical collection that was going to be meticulously documented and registered on a national level for the exhibition.

Having been encouraged by the success of the Millennium exhibition, the then Minister of Religion and Public Education not only guaranteed his support for the Hungarian military museum to be set up, but also proposed the military historical collection of the Hungarian National Museum be transferred to it. However, these promises came to nothing for various reasons and part of the collection ended up being transferred to Vienna and other parts simply disappeared.

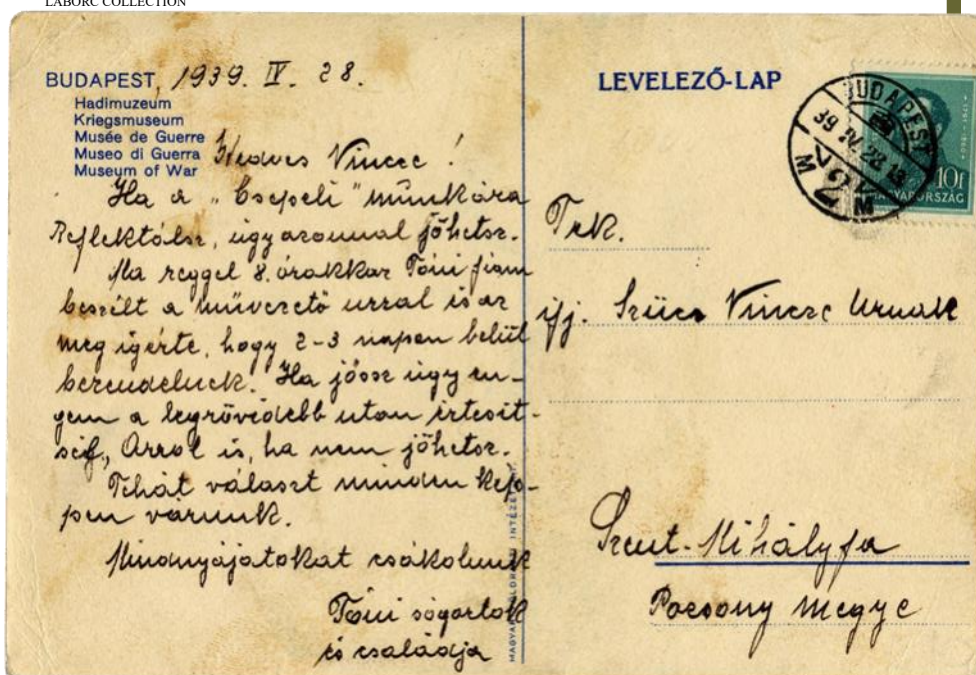
The Great War created a new situation. The only place available to store the large variety of war relics collected from the beginning, as well as the enormous amount of war booty, was the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna. To solve the pressing issue of storage space which had come about by 1916 the common Minister of Military Affairs formulated a scheme to construct a new and suitably sized museum block in Vienna. However, he did not rule out the

Left and below: Front and back of a 1930s Royal Hungarian War Museum postcard.

## The Genesis

The idea of the foundation of the Hungarian Military History Museum was conceived after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and the subject kept re-surfacing as a political issue. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had its own military history museum in Vienna, and most Hungarian relics were then transferred to the Imperial and Royal public collection there.

The initiative to establish an independent Hungarian military museum was by proposal of the Military Science Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The proposal was submitted to the Minister of Religion and Public Education in December 1888. The committee proposed a gradual expansion of the military historical collection of the







**Left:**  
The cover of a 1949 Hungarian Military History Museum souvenir postcard booklet.

**Below:**  
One of the eight detachable postcards. This one features the “Exposition Hall of Arms.”

The others images are dedicated to the 1848-1849 War of Independence, the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Memorial Hall of Partisans, the Military History Archives, and an exposition of the Hungarian People’s Army.

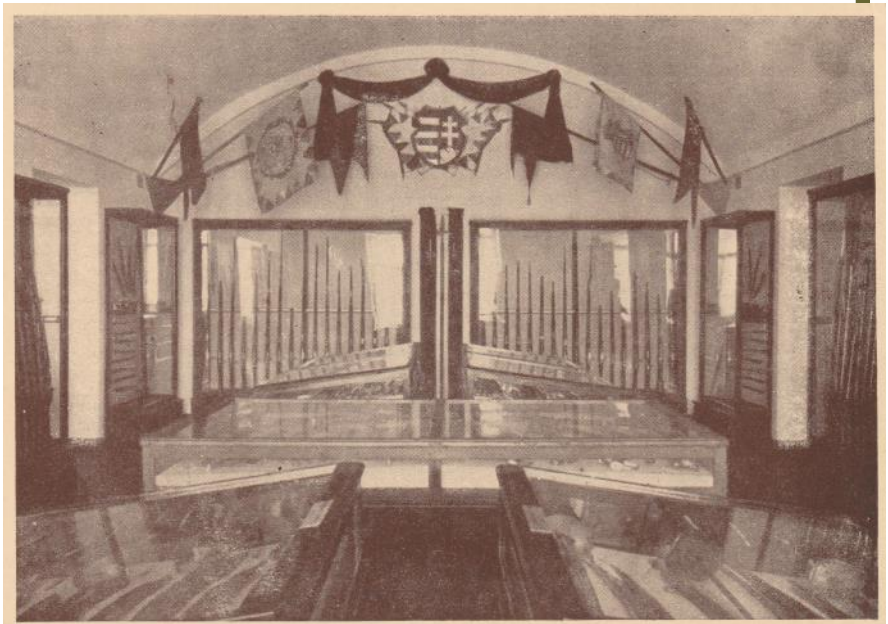
CZINK COLLECTION

safeguarding of the overspill at “affiliate military museums.” Baron Sándor Szurmay, the Hungarian Minister of Defence took advantage of this situation in order to promote the foundation of an independent military museum in Budapest. The core team of this enterprise was the sub-branch responsible for the museological collection of the Ministry’s archives division that had existed since November 1915. The museum was planned to include the military archives as well. Following protracted political skirmishing, Emperor Charles I of Austria (King Charles IV of Hungary) gave his preliminary consent to this plan being submitted to the Council of Ministers. The latter approved this concept and also consented to the construction of the museum to be built on Gellért Hill in Budapest to be provided by the capital free of charge.

### **The Museum’s History from 1918 to 1945**

It was not possible in the final days of WWI to bring this plan to fruition, nor in the revolutionary atmosphere which followed the collapse of the Monarchy. Nevertheless, due to their own efforts in the middle of November 1918 Lieutenant Colonel (later General) János Gabányi and Captain (later Colonel) Kamil Aggházy, both of Division 1/a of the Ministry of Defence, instituted the Military History Archives and the Military History Museum. Work began almost immediately in the rooms of the barely finished building of the Hungarian National Archives, since apart from the WWI material, there could not be any delay with the systematic collection of the relics and documents from the two major political transformations, the Hungarian (People’s) Republic, and the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic (formed on 21 May).

The fate of the Royal Hungarian Military History Archives and the Royal Hungarian Military History Museum was therefore linked together from the very beginning. Their



names occasionally changed during the following decades, reflecting on the current situation, in which the two public collections existed with separate headquarters and organizationally sometimes separated, sometimes joined until 1945. Usually it was part of the Royal Hungarian Defence Forces’ organization, but was attached to the Ministry of Culture for short periods.

The Military History Museum that safeguarded a collection of nearly 5,400 artefacts was housed in a dedicated part of the Maria Theresa Barracks in June 1920. This site was not capable of accommodating large pieces, such as cannon or vehicles. Under the harsh economic circumstances all that could be achieved was the modest preservation of the assembled artefacts. The physical opportunities for the acquisition of new items decreased to the minimum, while artefacts were delivered continuously from disbanded military units. Insufficient space did not allow any public exhibition. That notwithstanding, under these constrained



circumstances the organizational and operational protocols of a new national public collection were created and personnel recruited. A warehouse was opened on Gubacsi Road to store large military technical objects. The bi-functional institution was divided in November 1922 and the Museum became an independent institution under the command of Chief Councillor, Rear Admiral Károly Lucich (1868–1952).

In organizing the Museum and making it prosper, Kamil



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Aggházy earned everlasting merit and his life, as a self-educated military historian, scientific and institutional organiser intertwined inseparably with the fate of this public collection. He chose his colleagues quite fortunately: the cultural historian Béla Borsody-Bevilaqua (1885–1962), the numismatist Rezső Korny (1876–1958) or Aladár Görgey (1883–1945), head of the library, who had been saving and identifying the artefacts until his death in the autumn of 1945.

Having been reconstructed between 1926 and 1929, the annex of the Nándor Barracks in the Castle of Buda facing the Vérmező was chosen to be the new home of the Museum. It was not until 1937 that the former barracks, which provided modern and suitable accommodation, had the collection installed and the permanent exhibition ready. On May 29 of the same year (on Heroes' Day) the first exhibition, in thirty-six exhibition rooms and in the corridors that had a total length of 260 metres, was opened to the public. Visitors could view the history of the period between 1686 and 1914 on the ground floor of the building, while the 1st floor hosted the memorabilia of the Great War, and the

2nd floor provided space for specialised collections. Regent Miklós Horthy honoured the opening gala with his presence.

Nothing can better evidence the incremental significance of the Museum than the acquisition of relevant and high-value national treasures in the 1920s and 1930s. The return of more than 2,000 artefacts relative to Hungary back to their land of origin from the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna had been considered a milestone. The acceptance of these items, pursuant to Article 177 of the Treaty of Trianon, took place in an orderly fashion at Baden bei Wien on 26 May 1926 in full conformity with the accord entered into with the Austrian federal government. At the same time, due to generous donations by private individuals and other bodies, by further deposits, acquisitions and domestic and foreign auctions, the collection was enriched with many remarkable artefacts and objects such as national relics dating to the 1848–1849 War of Independence, the military uniforms of members of the Habsburg family, memorabilia collected from military units, and complete collections. The Museum established its national collection network and liaison with other domestic and foreign associate institutions in those years.

A series of Hungarian military celebrations at the Castle of Buda was



initiated by the Museum in 1920. The Museum took on the lion's share of the organization of the so-called Commemoration Day of Mohács (in 1926) as well as the installation of the commemoration plaques along the route between Budapest and Mohács. It also earned impressive

Above:

**Modern postcard featuring a wartime painting of Senior Private Gyula Kecskés in action, who was killed while saving the life of his company commander. The back has facsimile stamps with 1943 War Correspondents' Exposition cancellations.**



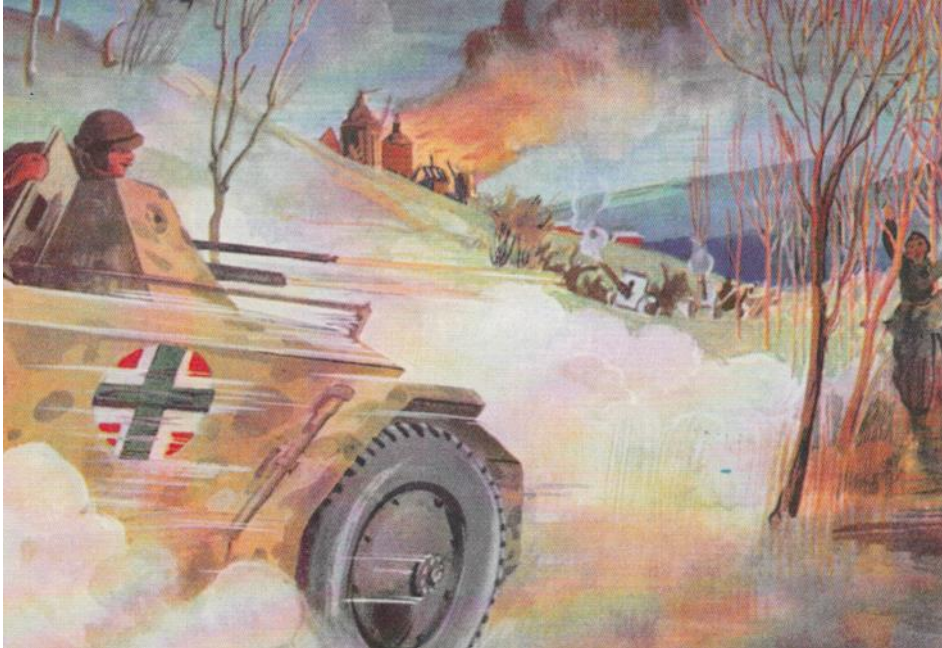
accolades in the completion of the survey locating Hungarian war graves and in caring for the graves of eminent soldiers that rested in peace in various cemeteries. The institution established a rural correspondence network and an acquisition team with 140 personnel. It founded the Hungarian Military Museum Society in 1924, which published a journal titled *Hadimúzeumi Lapok* (“Military Museum Journal”), later *História* (History), which published

relics of the 1848–1849 War of Independence.

The library has always been connected to the Military Museum since its foundation. Its collection of military regulations is unique in Europe. A studio for painting and statuary, another one for arts and crafts, as well as a locksmith’s and joiner’s workshop have also been part of the Museum from the beginning.

During the Second World War, 1943 was the last year when the Museum functioned with full capacity. All of the exhibitions could be visited in the summer of that year, and, new features, such as the so-called Russian Hall, opened. One of the officers employed at the Museum was assigned to enter military operation zones to carry out active collecting of artefacts. Frequent air raids, however, forced the personnel to bring into effect the regulations for the protection of the artefacts. They were packed in the beginning of 1944 and were placed in containers in the cellar of the Museum until the summer of the same year. Exhibitions in seven rooms could still be visited though.

After the frontline reached Hungarian territory, the Minister of Defence ordained the relocation of the Museum personnel and the collections in October



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both specialist and general articles, as well as news about the Museum and for veterans, it also organised affiliate societies in the country (in Debrecen, Nyíregyháza, Szeged, etc.), and it lined up veterans associations to serve the Museum with their activities.

Following the Museum’s move to the Castle District, the Minister of Defence ordered the revision of the Institution’s and its collections’ activity of the past ten years. The ambits conducted with the inclusion of specialists from the National Museum also provided an opportunity to divide the overlapping coverage of the collections of the two institutions in October 1935; regarding the purviews of their respective collection of military historical memorabilia, the year of 1715 was determined as the dividing point, because this was the year when the Hungarian Diet ratified the setting up of a standing army. Following upon the accord reached between the museums artefacts were exchanged. The Military Museum handed over artefacts and objects dating to the Ottoman occupation of Hungary and the National Museum delivered the priceless

1944. The assortment to be rescued was delivered to the Erdődy Manor in Somlólvár that was connected to the village of Doba in Veszprém County. Although the removal order unambiguously concerned valuable objects, it is impossible to ascertain what exactly was transported. On the strength of

Above:

**Modern postcard featuring a wartime painting of armoured platoon commander Gyula Keresztes heroically attacking Soviet infantry and artillery. The back has facsimile stamps with 1943 War Correspondents’ Exposition cancellations.**





the available roster, 883 containers were carried by ten railway freight cars. To date, no records have been found which shed light on what became of the evacuated items. At Somlóvár, the relocated personnel could not conduct any professional activity, but Géza Turányi (Thurner) (1892–1952), a tireless secretary of the Museum used his personal connections fully to prevent the collection under his care to be destroyed or transported abroad. In 1945, the manor house

to provide opportunity through different military, civil and party organizations to assess the remaining Museum materials and to return the evacuated artefacts. Through the activities of the colleague sent to Doba-Somlóvár, Dr. Béla Szentneményi (Valentin) (1906–199?), who had served at the Museum since the early 1940s and in 1949–1950 as Colonel was its Commander, a relative picture was obtained of the extent of destruction. Following many waves of looting, the

surviving artefacts were packed and delivered to Budapest by six railway freight cars and two lorries. Meanwhile at the Military Museum the personnel continued to tidy up the debris; the returned containers were stockpiled on the ground floor in eight more or less “reconstructed” halls the windows of which were bricked up offering partial protection from rain. The situation worsened as the documents of the Military Archives also had to be saved from the dilapidated building of the National Archives, where it had been operating since 1918, and placed in the intact rooms of the Museum. This took place under the direction of Gyula Erdélyi.

From 15 May 1945, the Institution was called Hungarian Military Museum and between September 1946 and March 1947, Honvéd Museum, given the Allied



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was utterly abandoned as Soviet troops approached; later the Museum personnel were captured by the Soviets and the items stored there were left unguarded. Up to 80% of them were destroyed. Later, the Soviet supreme command had a part of them, including the flag collection, transported to the Soviet Union.

In 1945, serial bombing and fighting in Budapest, especially in the Castle District inflicted severe damage on the building of the Museum. Its south-western corner was reduced to rubble, and three-quarters of its roof structure collapsed. Its surviving sections became useless and the debris covered almost everything that had not been evacuated. Books pierced by bullets, water stained and muddied scripts, as well as fragments of decorations and medals vividly demonstrate this event, even today. The vast majority of the exhibition showcases were destroyed, and all of the windows were smashed.

### The Museum after WWII

After peace was restored, the Museum immediately tried

Commission Committee’s approval only for the operation of a museum. They faced issues regarding the low number of the professional personnel – almost everyone from the “Doba detachment” fell into Soviet captivity, and even those who had remained in the capital scattered with a few exceptions.

Above:

Postcard featuring a wartime painting of anti-tank section leader Corporal József Pardi destroying three enemy tanks with the help of bicycle troops. The back has facsimile stamps with 1943 War Correspondents’ Exposition cancellations.





The miserable storage conditions also caused a serious problem.

Until 1949 the personnel of the Museum, which almost completely changed, primarily focused on the renovation of the building and the improvement of the conditions under which the collection could be secured. Losses were evaluated and collecting started again. A wide range of donations arrived from many parts of the country, and official and

public again on 21 May 1949, on the 100th anniversary of the recapture of Buda Castle. On display in four halls were exhibits representing the new People's Army; the Hungarian Army of 1848–1849 that was considered to be the former's forerunner; the Hungarian Red Army of 1919; and the Hungarian anti-fascists of the period between 1936 and 1945. Another two halls offered insight into the treasures of the Weapons Collection and the Archives.



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social organizations eagerly cooperated in the collecting process. Each and every material group received its own referent, who was also a professional of a certain period of military history. Weapon historian Dr. Ferenc Csillag (1907–1989), who was Commander of the Museum after his return from Soviet captivity, from 1950 to 1971, was a charismatic leader.

The first temporary exhibition of the Museum after the war was opened at the municipality hall: the memorabilia of the Hungarian partisans and the artefacts of the 1848–1849 War of Independence were exhibited from 15 March 1947. In 1948, all of the remaining relics dating from 1848–1849 were exhibited at the central centennial exhibition held at the Hungarian National Museum. In September 1948, the second repatriation of the flags of 1848–1849 was an outstanding national event. In fact not only these were returned by Soviet authorities, but other invaluable pieces of the Museum's flag collection too, approximately 200 banners.

The Military History Museum could open its gates to the

Decree No. 13 of the Presidential Council of the People's Republic of Hungary issued on 16 November 1949 nationalised museums and established a network of state museums; this included the Military Museum categorised as a specialised museum. The future of exhibitions was clearly defined by political requirements. However, the 1950 commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Józef Bem's death and the 1953 Rákóczi exhibition, which was organised in cooperation with the History Museum, the National Archives and the Hungarian National Library, suited these requirements well. In 1955, a spectacular exhibition opened to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the liberation from German occupation.

The 300 square-metre, two level hall in the northern wing of the Museum



later offered an opportunity to present the extensive artillery collection. A horse artillery team, more than thirty cannon, barrels and contrivances presented the evolution of artillery from the 14th-century bombard to the 20th-century 120mm mortar.

Above:

Postcard featuring a wartime painting of Hungarian Air Force pilot 1st Lieutenant László Potyondi low-level strafing enemy troops. The back has facsimile stamps with 1943 War Correspondents' Exposition cancellations.



The library with special fitted furniture, which miraculously remained mostly intact during the war, could also be restored and rearranged. It has functioned as a reading room ever since, today named after the man who dreamed it up, Kamil Aggházy.

Decree No. 9 of 1963 of the Presidential Council empowered the Military History Museum to acquire a national scope of authority in order to exclusively collect,

schoolchildren recall with nostalgia that back then, with the permission of the Park's omniscient overseer, they sometimes could climb inside the military vehicles. The Park was also unanimously popular among the elders too, who shared their military experiences while sitting on the benches in the shade of the trees. This was followed by the establishment of an extended network of military technology parks in the country and then by the professional support

provided to the founding of several new regimental museums within the Army. It was around this time that the Museum's first travelling exhibition, a reconstructed armored train was created (1969).

It was also in the 1960s that various educational programmes which are considered as common museum programmes today, were introduced. The Institution paid increasing attention to the education of conscript soldiers. They were to visit the Military History Museum at least once during their time of service. On 1 December 1969, the Exhibition Department, which had been responsible for both collections and exhibitions, was divided into a Collection and an Exhibition Department. In the spring of 1971, Volume 1 of the Museum's Yearbook (*A Hadtörténeti Múzeum Értesítője*) was published. The unique exhibition titled "Selected



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safeguard, conserve, process and exhibit the artefacts of Hungarian and Hungarian-related military history. This status was not only an acknowledgement that the Museum's collection was an essential part of Hungarian cultural heritage, and therefore it was under complete legal protection, but it also obliged the Museum to carry out special tasks like professional inspection or to comply with high standards in the field of collection management.

Due to the cultural political requirements, the previously set time limit regarding collecting (the year 1715) also changed. Resulting from the guidelines of patriotic education, a permanent exhibition had to be created on Hungarian military history from the Conquest period to the "liberation" of the country, which was gradually implemented by the staff in ten rooms between 1960 and 1968.

An open-air exhibition established in 1963–1964 in the inner courtyard of the Military History Museum memorably introduced the products of military science, such as tanks, aircraft, and cannon, to several generations. Former



Military Medals," which displayed hundreds of Hungarian and foreign orders, decorations and medals, complemented with material from the Hungarian National Museum, was opened in 1972. In 1973, the permanent exhibition titled "The 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence"

Above:

**Postcard featuring a wartime painting of Sergeant Pál Antal heroically attacking an enemy machine gun emplacement. The back has facsimile stamps with 1943 War Correspondents' Exposition cancellations.**





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also received an Award of Excellence.

The inauguration of the first museum of a fighting arm was in 1977. In Várpalota, the stronghold of Hungarian artillery, an overall artillery history exhibition and park was opened in the renovated Zichy Palace and its well-kept surroundings. In 1980, an extraordinary exhibition presented artefacts of the Soviet–Hungarian space flight for the first time, including the landing unit of the Soyuz 35. The exhibition titled “Weapons of Our Ancestors – Ancestors of Our Weapons” travelled around the country from 1981. Foreign relations also expanded. In 1983–1984, an exhibition of the Weimar City Museum was hosted which presented scenes and battles from different ages with the help of tin soldiers.

As one of the first public collections in Hungary, the Museum paid special attention to the issue of museum visits by disabled people from the 1980s. From 1984, the Museum offered opportunities for different generations of the blind and visually impaired to get to know military relics by touch. The Museum regularly welcomed disabled visitors too. The part of the permanent exhibition series presenting the events of the Second World War and the establishment of the Democratic Army was opened in 1980, then expanded and rearranged in 1985.

Displaying the flags of the Hungarian military past at state and military celebrations became a constant need. In order to avoid the use of original flags the solution was to produce a series of reconstructions of historic colours and standards. The line of historic flags was first presented at the military parade in 1985 and has become part of state protocol since then.

received the Award of Excellence from the Ministry of Culture. The first all-round temporary uniform history exhibition, “Hundred Years of Hungarian Military Attire” was another spectacular display in the same year. From the summer of 1973, concerts promoting Hungarian military music regularly took place in the inner courtyard. Special exhibitions included one dedicated to the history of artillery, a pistol and a polearm exhibition opened in 1973, followed by the first great, seven-hall small arms exhibition in 1974, and then the hunting and marksman weapons exhibition in May 1977. In 1976, a new element in the line of permanent exhibitions titled “The Austro–Hungarian Monarchy and the First World War” was opened.

Annual temporary exhibitions became regular, presenting military-related art by contemporary artists, as well as the latest acquisitions of the Museum. A new part of the temporary exhibition series opened in 1979, presenting the events of 1918–1919, which



Above:

Postcard featuring a wartime painting of Private László Csíkós who was killed in action while attacking the enemy with his bayonet and hand grenades. The back has facsimile stamps with 1943 War Correspondents’ Exposition cancellations.

From 1986, there were plans to reconstruct the building, by then considered a part of the cultural heritage, to build facilities in the attic, and to add a modern annex to the structure. In order to do so, the courtyard had to be vacated,



therefore the open-air exhibition was moved. However, the discovery of the remains of the city wall of Buda and the horseshoe tower built during the reign of King Béla IV in the 13th century, as well as other archaeological finds, unique in this part of the Castle District, obstructed the process. Due to the excavations, reconstruction was put on hold, and eventually, owing to the lack of finances, it was cancelled.

As a priority issue of Lieutenant Colonel (later Colonel) Tibor Hetés (1930–), Museum Commander between 1975 and 1989, the Museum's active participation in international museum life became frequent from the mid 1970s. This network of connections even led to Western contacts, which were unprecedented in the period. Relations with the town of Vittoria, which had preserved the memory of a First World War prisoner of war camp in Sicily, and with the First World War focused "Friends of the Dolomites", which included people from several nations, unfolded during the 1980s.

In 1986, two important exhibitions opened in the Museum: first, a spectacular display titled "Buda Castle 1686", which commemorated the 300th anniversary of the liberation from Ottoman rule, with materials loaned by Austrian, Croatian and Polish collections. Then, within a month, a four-hall exhibition titled "The History of Small Arms" was implemented, providing knowledge through an extraordinary wealth of materials. In 1988, the Museum's first exhibition opened in Kötschach-Mauthen, at the Austrian exhibition hall of the "Friends of the Dolomites."

On the 70th anniversary of the Institution, a representative exhibition titled "From Decade to Decade" provided an attractive selection of the Museum's items in chronological order of their acquisition, featuring several artefacts that had never been shown to the public before, or not since 1945. The display acknowledged curators who had enriched the collections; former donors; and all those who had preserved historic items even if they sold them to the Museum. The Military Modellers Club, which had been supported by the Museum, organised its first exhibition titled "Hussars of the Centuries", to be followed by further highly popular model shows ("Military Technology of the Second World War", 1989; "Napoleonic Muster", 1991; "The Gulf War", 1991). The 1989 exhibition titled "Army and Photography – 150 Years of Military Photography" was an overall presentation of a specialised collection.

The Democratic Transformation in Hungary in 1989 had a decisive impact on the Institution. The new leadership faced new challenges, some of which required a rather wide range of expertise, such as cooperating in the renewing of Hungarian military symbols, uniforms, honours and celebrations. A full rethinking of the historical perspectives of the exhibitions, thus the rearrangement of the permanent exhibitions became unavoidable. The dual legal status, however, remained the same: the Institution has been maintained by the Ministry of Defence, while professional supervision has been provided by the Ministry for Cultural Affairs.

In 1991, two exhibitions were opened handling subjects that had previously been considered untouchable, yet they had significantly influenced life in the military. The temporary exhibition titled "Our Strength, though Weakened – Field Chaplains and Their Churches, 1945–1951" opened

almost simultaneously with "The Star of David and the Two-Headed Eagle – Jewish Soldiers in Service of Emperor and King, 1788–1918", which was organised in cooperation with the Military History Service of Vienna. The 1991 exhibition titled "Orders, Decorations and Medals," organised in cooperation with the Hungarian National Museum, presented outstanding pieces from the Numismatic Collection. The Military History Museum was the first in Hungary to undertake to present the 1956 events in an exhibition with dignity and without any bias ("13 Days – Revolution and War of Independence in Hungary, 23 October to 4 November 1956"). The exhibition opened on 23 October 1991.

### **The Museum after the Democratic Transformation**

After the democratic changes, the Museum's relations with the Hungarian diaspora in the West revived. As a result, the collections of military memorabilia that they had preserved with great care returned to Hungary and were integrated into the exhibition scheme of the Museum ("For the Homeland until Death – The History of the Royal Hungarian Ludovika Academy 1808–1944", 1992; "Hungarian Aero Museum, Oshawa", 1992; "Museum of the Royal Hungarian Armed Forces, Toronto", 2000). Materials from the above collections were on display for years under the title "Returned Collections." Today, their outstanding pieces enrich the Museum's permanent exhibitions.

The temporary exhibition titled "Your Fame Lives with Us" was made in 1993 to commemorate the Royal Hungarian Defence Forces on the anniversary of its establishment, and it also included a section dedicated to the Institution's history. Remembrance provided the framework in 1994 for another exhibition titled "...and Hungary Is a Battlefield, 1944." At the same time, the spectacular "Art of Medals" exhibition during the XXIV congress of the International Art Medal Federation (FIDEM) drew another type of attention to the institution.

The exhibition "Humans in Inhumanity – Remembering the First World War" was a true milestone in the line of lifestyle exhibitions and in the Museum's relations with other institutions. Made in cooperation with and presented at the Hungarian National Library, this rich exhibition provided new perspectives. In 1995, an exhibition on traditional Indonesian weapons, from the material of a private collection opened relations to a more exotic direction, as well as "American Soldiers at the European Theatre 1944–1945" that also displayed the material of a private collector.

A joint project with the Hungarian National Library in early 1996, the exhibition titled "From Dance to Dance – Balls and Parties from the Austro–Hungarian Compromise to the 1940s" was based on a large-scale loaning of materials, and had a great success among visitors and professionals. To celebrate the 1100th anniversary of the Hungarian Conquest, the Museum paid tribute to the "most Hungarian" type of soldier under the title "Hussars – Centuries of a Class of Light Cavalry." The re-conquest of Ottoman occupied territories in Hungary was evoked in three consecutive years in joint exhibitions with the Hungarian National Library ("Buda Eliberata – The Liberated Buda 1686", 1996; "Hungaria Eliberata – The Liberated Hungary 1683–1718", 1997; "Theatrum Europeum 1648–1748", 1998).



The commemoration on All Souls' Day was a tradition in the life of the Museum in the interwar period and it was renewed after the democratic changes. Today, this event is part of the official programme of the highest state and diplomatic bodies. Similarly, it has been a tradition since 1992 to commemorate the military tragedy at the River Don on the anniversary of the Uryv breakthrough on 12 January 1943.

In the spring of 1997, the Military Museum Foundation was established on a private initiative, but with the public aim to support the Museum financially and morally and to commemorate Kamil Aggházy. It contributes to the Institution's activities with publications, the acquisition of workshop and technical equipment, financing various events and exhibitions. It also institutes and bestows awards at the Institution's traditional birthday celebrations, which aims at strengthening bonds between active and former colleagues.

The most important background to exhibitions is provided by restorers. Their responsible and professional work requires great skill and knowledge. Owing to their activity, there is no need to be concerned about the further decay or damage of valuable materials, either in the exhibitions or the storage area. The Museum's restorers and weaponsmiths specialising in metal, wood, textile and leather have performed outstandingly for decades. The workshop of paper restorers, equipped by the Military Museum Foundation, has functioned since 1998.

The Museum's next Award of Excellence was received in 1998, for the exhibition commemorating the 150th anniversary of the 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence titled "The Sword Shines Brighter than the Chain," which received nationwide acknowledgement and was followed by the first representative catalogue published by the Museum. As a positive consequence of the exhibition, the Museum developed a successful professional relationship with the Museum of Arad (Complexul Muzeal Arad), which preserves the relics of the Martyrs of Arad and other memorabilia from 1848–1849. The exhibition titled "I Am a Mountain Trooper High in the Carpathians" was opened in 1999, on the 60th anniversary of the organisation of the Royal Hungarian Defence Forces' mountain troops that existed between 1939 and 1945.

In the meantime, items in the Military Technology Park had reached a critical state near decay. They were not even safe in the closed depot. At this point, the Museum managed to win József Pintér, entrepreneur from town of Kecel to its cause. As a result of his patronage unparalleled in the region, the Museum's large and well-maintained Military Technology Park opened its gates on the premises of Pintér Művek on 18 May 2000.

The year 2000 was spent in the spirit of millennial celebrations of Hungarian statehood. The exhibition titled "Sword and Wreath – A Thousand Years of Military Symbols" was accompanied by a conference and a book. At the same time, an exhibition commemorated the 80th anniversary of the Military Technology Institute.

In 2001, the Institution participated in celebrating the Hungarian Millennium in Vienna with the "Iron Curtain Exhibition" titled *Der Eisene Vorhang; and Kaiser und König. Eine historische Reise Österreich und Ungarn 1526–*

1918. The family aspects of military history and the passing of the military profession from generation to generation was demonstrated through the story of a family ("Soldier Fathers, Soldier Sons"). The exhibition titled "For Bravery" commemorated the acts of bravery of soldiers who were awarded the Hungarian Golden Bravery Medal for Officers during the Second World War, a topic that had not been introduced before.

In 2002, the Museum's first archaeological exhibition was opened ("Bajcsavár – A Styrian Fortress in Hungary"). The special characteristics of underwater archaeology were presented in a Croatian exhibition through the displayed artefacts found in the wreck of the battleship Szent István. The exhibition titled "Don Bend – The Royal Hungarian 2nd Army at the Eastern Front 1942–1943" was opened in 2003, commemorating the military tragedy at the River Don with a new approach and modern technology. The prelude to this was the exhibition titled "Ashes to Ashes" on the subject of paying tribute to the fallen, which was opened on 31 October 2001, as a cooperation between the Museum, the Central Archives and the Military War Grave Office. The exhibition was accompanied by the publishing of volumes under the same title and with the same topic.

Previously unknown situations, challenges and changes that followed Hungary's joining NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004, influenced the entire Hungarian Defence Forces and the Museum as well.

New fields of collecting, topics, possibilities and demands came into view. New partnerships and the more and more extensive participation in peacekeeping operations and international missions provided new opportunities. Consequently, it is inevitable to collect actively and to maintain contacts, often internationally; to explore and keep track of artefacts and documents belonging to the Museum's range of the collecting; to keep up continuous dialogue with private collectors and to be present at auctions.

The composition and number of the Museum's visitors have changed too. As it is well known, after the 1989 democratic changes, the personnel of the Hungarian Army rapidly decreased. It was a measure of outstanding importance in 2004 to abolish the conscript army, which had had a deep-rooted tradition in Hungarian history. It also meant that the significant number of visits by organised military groups, which had been typical for decades, decreased.

The Museum had to open to the civilian society with regard to exhibition policy and the development of activities and events. Besides schools, the attention of other groups of visitors had to be attracted as well. The Museum participates in large, nationwide events more and more intensely. Each year, the Museum is present at the Mayday of Museums, a special Hungarian cultural weekend festival and muster of Hungarian museums, in the garden of the Hungarian National Museum on the occasion of International Museum Day (18 May). In addition, the Night of Museums (related to Midsummer Night) and the Museums' Autumn Festival also provide new and diverse opportunities inside the Museum to present the versatility of work in a public collection. Among the exhibitions in the period, the display presenting the history of the Hungarian Defence Forces at the Keckskemét



Airshow and the one offering an insight into 75 years of Civil Defence at the Museum should be mentioned.

The reorganizations that have taken place at the Military History Institute and Museum since the 1990s resulted in a series of changes to the organization of work, the work environment and the external appearance of the Institution, as well.

Certain storage problems were definitely solved when a building at Verseny Street, which had previously belonged to the Hungarian Post, was allocated to the Institution. The new storage space has provided better circumstances for the preservation of artefacts since 2006, and therefore the Collection of Uniforms and Equipment, the Collection of Banners and Flags, the Collection of Posters and Small Prints, the Collection of Memorabilia and the textile restorer's workshop have been more favourably located. The lifetime of a permanent exhibition usually is ten to fifteen years. After one and a half decades, they need to be "dusted," as during that timespan new scientific results are reached, new artefacts enrich the collections, new exhibition technologies become available and therefore the message can be brought closer to visitors in a new fashion. In that spirit, the Museum's permanent exhibitions went through changes between 2005 and 2016.

#### **The Military History Museum Today**

May 2005 saw the opening of a massive and spectacular exhibition titled "From the Piave to the Don River – The Military History of Hungary 1918–1943." Its sequel, "From the Don River to the Danube – The Military History of Hungary 1943–1948" was opened in 2006. The permanent exhibition presenting the military history of Hungary between 1948 and 1956, titled "Gratitude to the Heroes of Freedom" had been completed by October 2006, on the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, to be expanded in the following year to include the period until 1968, under the title "...and the Iron Curtain Has Fallen." In November 2008, on the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War, the exhibition titled "By the Time the Leaves Fall... and They Have Fallen" was ceremonially opened. The display representing Hungary's military history between 1867 and 1914 was opened in the autumn of 2010.

After a pause of one and a half decades, the scientific Yearbook of the Military History Museum, which was first published in 1971, has been issued on an annual basis since 2000. The volumes include articles on various military history topics; there is a vast amount of interesting information regarding the Museum's history, collections, and artefacts of significant importance, written by the Museum's curators.

Colleagues of the Museum have taken an active part in the production of the Institution's publications, the number of which has significantly increased in the recent years. Among these, the series of "slipcase books" are truly special, and are based on a concept that is considered an absolute novelty in Hungary, offering "touchable military history" to the reader: between the pages, in pockets, authentic reprints of original documents can be found.

As a result of a change of approach, today's permanent exhibits are characterised by interactivity besides a wealth

of artefacts and information.

The exhibition introducing the years 1815–1867, with special focus on the 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence, titled "Our Catchwords Were: Homeland and Progress" has been open to the public since 2013.

As a branch of the Military History Institute and Museum, the Commemorative Exhibition of the Battle of Pákozd-Sukoró was opened in the spring of 2014 and in the same year, the Lajta Monitor Museum Ship was anchored in front of the Parliament building in Budapest for the first time. The onetime river gunboat also toured the Danube between April and May 2018 attracting masses of people in several towns along the river.

For the centenary of the First World War, a travelling exhibition titled "Four Years in Blood and Iron – The Great War, 1914–1918" was created, and began its journey throughout the country in the summer of 2014. In 2016, a new permanent exhibition titled "Hungary in the Great War, 1914–1918" was opened as part of the centennial commemorations, fulfilling modern museum requirements. Simultaneously, the exhibition titled "Under the Flags of Francis Joseph – The Military History of Hungary, 1868–1914", presenting the Belle Époque, was also renewed.

With the support of the Gulag Memorial Committee, the permanent exhibition titled "Deported, Far From Home – Hungarian Soldiers in Soviet Captivity, 1941–1955" was opened, while the 1956 Remembrance Committee financed the creation of the travelling exhibition titled "56 Teardrops – Women's Fate in the Days of the 1956 Revolution and War of Independence and During the Years of Retaliation."

In 2017, at the Night of Museums the "Armoury – Visible Storage of Weaponry" opened its gates to the public. The Armoury aims to present the weapons, clothing and equipment of Hungarian soldiers from the 10th century to present. The Military History Museum continuously cooperates with most national and county museums, and occasionally with local museums, educational institutions, municipalities and civilian organizations. It maintains bilateral relations with museums and other organizations related to historical research from nine countries.

Among these, an outstandingly significant project bridging boundaries aimed at the scientific processing and publishing of the artefacts and documents of the former 1848–1849 Arad Relics Museum as part of an international (Hungarian–Romanian) cooperation lasting for years.

For want of space, the Museum's international network of connections, which characterised the Institution from the very beginning, i.e. the foundation of the Museum, cannot be discussed in detail here. The Museum presents various periods and relics of Hungarian military history in exhibitions throughout Europe, from Istanbul to Helsinki, from Moscow to Brussels. From the late 1980s, relations have strengthened particularly with First World War memorial sites; the Museum has permanent and temporary exhibitions, renewed from time to time, in Vittoria (Sicily), Kobarid (Slovenia), Oberdrauburg and Kötschach-Mauthen (Austria), Przemysl and Gorlice (Poland), to mention a few. Visitors can also see displays created by the Museum for example in Washington (USA), Brussels (Belgium) and at various NATO bases.



# A Museum's Gratitude

A Few Expressions of Recognition Issued by the Military History Museum and its Staff



CZINK COLLECTION

Left and below:  
Designed and produced in 1970, the Military History Museum issued this bronze commemorative plaque to deserving individuals. This example was awarded to eighty foreign dignitaries on the occasion of the Commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the "liberation of Hungary (from the Fascists)."



CZINK COLLECTION



Right:  
Matching commemorative stickpin from the 1970s.



CZINK COLLECTION

The Gold (reverse shown at left) and Silver (obverse shown at right) Medals of the Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum awarded for dedication and service in the interests of Hungarian military history preservation.



CZINK COLLECTION



Above:  
Bronze medal produced to honour Hungarian phaleristic matriarch Ágnes Makai. An account of her contribution to the study of Hungarian ODMs, particularly the Order of Maria Theresa, and her service to the Hungarian Military Museum would fill a volume of its own. One specimen in silver was presented to Ágnes.

Items on this page (except for the cased plaque) are shown actual size.



CZINK COLLECTION

Above: The new award plaque established in 1997 was re-named the Medal of Distinction of the Museum Foundation (shown in a bespoke fitted case).



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(also miniature Badge of Honour) \$5.00



IHMHPS  
Insignia in gold  
or silver \$7.00



IHMHPS  
embroidered patch  
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2008 - 2018  
Commemorative  
Badge in gold or  
silver \$7.50

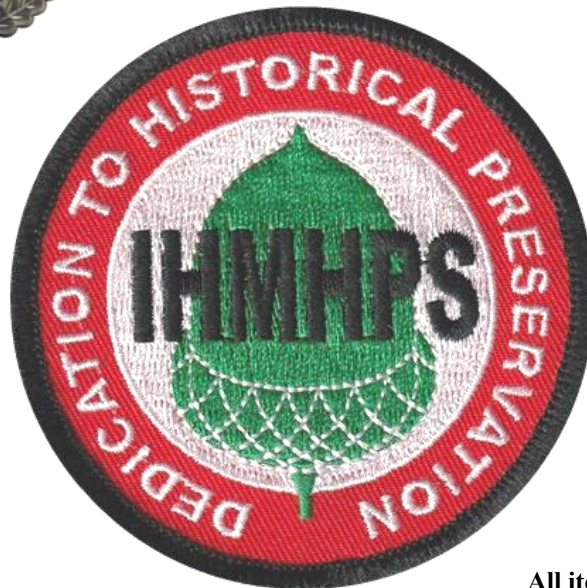


IHMHPS  
2014 - 2018  
Commemorative  
Badge \$20.00

IHMHPS Awards  
(Extras or replacements only available  
to those who have been awarded them.)  
Price on request



Magyar Front pins  
in gold or bronze  
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Recognition Project  
embroidered patch  
\$5.00



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(Prices do not  
include shipping.)



IHMHPS  
2014 - 2018  
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\$5.00



IHMHPS Ribbon Bars  
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Price on request