

# MAGYAR FRONT<sup>®</sup>

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WINTER 2020



## **HUNGARIAN PARACHUTE TROOPS AND THEIR INSIGNIA 1938-1945**

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

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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

The story of the fledgling Hungarian paratroopers is a poignant one – from underfunded beginnings to shocking tragedy, the new airborne soldiers barely had time to test their mettle in the role they trained so diligently for. The parachute troops did distinguish themselves later in the war, and the history of the St. László Division in which they fought is a significant piece of Hungarian military history - which would warrant another feature article.

In this issue of the *Magyar Front* author and historian Péter Mujzer shares his overview of the introduction of Hungary's airborne forces; and Dr. Gergely Sallay has provided documentation of their famous insignia. A selection of endearing period postcards illustrates the affection given the paratroops by the people of their homeland.

This is the first time our publication is treated to an article by Péter Mujzer, however, his work is well known: he is the co-author of *Horrido - Hitler's Axis Air Forces on the Eastern-Front* and the author of *Hungarian Mobile Forces in WWII*, *Huns on Wheels*, *Hungarian Armoured Forces in WWII*, and *Operational History of the Hungarian Armoured Troops in WWII*.

To order his publications, contact him at [hunsonwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:hunsonwheels@yahoo.com). I very much appreciate not only his kindness and generosity, but also his raising awareness of Hungarian military history by providing English speakers with much sought after information.

The insignia of any elite military organization always generates interest among collectors and history buffs and Hungarian paratrooper badges are no exception. Gergely Sallay has provided information and images of some very rare insignia which are invaluable in helping to differentiate authentic examples from the myriad of reproductions on the market today. He has made it possible, with the Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum, for our readers to see genuine examples, along with original documents illustrating the history of their design.

As usual, this issue would be lacking without the help of Maj. Dr. Tamás Baczoni and Péter v. Laborc.

P.Cz.

## To Commemorate 20 Years of Publication: Our New Magyar Front Lapel Pin

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# *Hungarian Paratroopers, 1938-1941*

*by Péter Mujzer*

**Hungarian paratroopers - featured in the 1942 Ministry of Defence calendar (for the week of February 16th-22nd).**

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Lessons learned from trench warfare - including the need for mobile and airborne forces, were clearly understood by Hungary's military leadership. The conflicts in Spain and Ethiopia, along with the development of the Soviet and German armed forces was also very influential, however, the poor condition and restrictions of the Army allowed only modest developments of Hungary's airborne troops.

In 1938, the Hungarian Ministry of Defence decided to create its own airborne infantry force, and a paratrooper test centre was established at Szombathely. It was organised by Major Árpád Bertalan, a World War I assault troops officer, and recipient of the highest military decoration of the Imperial and Royal Armed Forces - the Order of Maria Theresia. Bertalan organised an experimental paratrooper training cadre with seven officers and NCOs. Later thirty-five and then a further twenty-eight NCOs and men joined the unit.

Even though parachuting was in its infancy in 1938, many enthusiastic Hungarian infantry NCOs and officers volunteered to join this new unit. Parachutes and other airborne equipment were purchased from all over Europe and the USA - the Italian Salvatore parachute, the German Schroder type, and the US Irving parachute were all utilized by the Hungarians. Many parachute drops were made from 1920s Italian Caproni 101 aircraft.

Later, in 1939, the Hungarian Army developed its own locally-manufactured equipment: knee and elbow pads and a jump smock, as well as the Hess M1939 parachute. The Hungarians also updated their aircraft inventory with the Italian Savoia-Marchetti SM-75 and other modern aircraft. The first choice would have been the German Junkers Ju-52, however, the ones in Hungarian service were used by the Air Force for transport duties. Later, in 1942, twelve Fiat G-12 transport planes were purchased.

The Hungarian Army Chief of Staff was impressed by the first training exercises of the paratroopers and recognized many practical applications for the new force within the regular army. At the beginning (similarly to other countries), two different approaches existed regarding how to use, organise, equip, and deploy the paratroopers.

The Air Force approach was to use small scale, diversionary forces to carry out attacks against dedicated, high profile targets (headquarters, bridges, road, and railway centres) deep behind the enemy lines. This kind of operation needed highly trained and dedicated troops familiar with commando-style warfare. The Army, however, needed airborne infantry to carry out vertical envelopments in close cooperation with the land forces. This kind of operation needed company/battalion sized battle groups, reinforced with infantry heavy weapons, anti-tank and light guns. Although the paratroopers

were trained as an elite light infantry force, from the Army point of view the only difference between the infantry and airborne troops was its means of transportation.

The Hungarian Army command expanded the paratrooper training program in 1940 and moved its location to the Pápa Airport, where it established a standardized paratrooper school. The troops moved into the old Cavalry Barracks at Pápa. The Hungarian paratroopers were comprised of one battalion of three companies with a total nominal strength of 410: 30 officers, 120 NCOs, and 250 enlisted men. The first operational battalion was ready by 1941.

The Hungarian national airline MALÉRT (Magyar Légiforgalmi R.T.) ceased operations on January 16th, 1941 in accordance with the mobilisation plan, and five Savoia-Marchetti SM 75 trimotor transports were transferred into the Hungarian Air Force along with their personnel and equipment. They were formed into the 1st Parachute Transport Squadron and, adding reservists, soon expanded into a battalion.

The transport planes carried the E-101 to E-105 identification numbers. They were present in the Hungarian order of battle for the invasion of Yugoslavia (renamed the 1st Independent Parachute Battalion), and commanded by Major Árpád v. Bertalan.

In April 1941 the German Army wanted to use Hungary as a jumping-off point for their invasion of Yugoslavia. Permission was granted by the Hungarian authorities for the Germans to pass through Hungarian territory to launch their attack. The Hungarian Army was indecisive regarding their role however, and their leadership waited until Croatia (now an autonomous region of Yugoslavia) declared its independence on April 10th, 1941. That was used as an excuse to deploy the Hungarian forces to protect the Hungarian minorities living in the former Yugoslavian territories which belonged to Hungary before the end of the First World War.

While the Hungarian forces began the invasion of Voivodina (Bácska) on April 11th, the Yugoslavian Air Force attacked several Hungarian targets affiliated with German troop deployments. The Hungarian Parachute Battalion was placed on alert for possible deployment and kept in reserve by the Hungarian 3rd Army (commanded by Lieutenant General Gorondy-Novák). When the Hungarians attacked from the north, the Yugoslav troops retreated from their first defensive line along the border with Hungary, behind the Franz Josef Canal. The canal divides the Bácska area and the two canal bridges at Szenttamás and Verbász

had to be taken before the Hungarian Mobile Corps (commanded by Major General Béla Miklós) could occupy the rest of the region. The Hungarian Parachute Battalion

was to be dropped behind these lines, to approach the bridges from the rear, and seize them.

On April 12th, 1941, the Hungarian paratroopers prepared for their first combat jump. The rainy spring weather prevailed through the whole operation during the Yugoslavian campaign, which hampered both land and air activities. The empty transport aircraft flew over to Veszprém Air Field - operations had been shifted there because rain had left the runway at Pápa Airport, composed of compressed dirt and gravel, too muddy for use. The airfield at Veszprém was the only military airbase with a cement runway, so it was used that day for the airborne assault on Yugoslavia. The reinforced 1st Paratrooper Company and their equipment were transported by truck to the airport.

Aircraft were to drop about 200 men in two separate waves

to the target area. The first wave consisted of four transport planes carrying twenty-two paratroopers each, and their equipment in drop canisters fixed in the load compartments of the SM-75 planes. The four planes would fly in rhomboid formation and drop the paratroopers within sixty seconds over the double bridge of Újverbász on the afternoon of April 12th to capture the bridges and dismantle the demolition charges, while preventing the destruction of the vital communication junction. The second wave would drop on the morning of April 13th to reinforce the defence of the bridges until the arrival of the land forces.

The take-off was ordered at 17:00 hours on April 12th. The E-101 was piloted by Captain László Kelemen, the commander of the Transport Squadron. Major Árpád Bertalan, the commander of the 1st Independent Paratrooper Battalion sat behind him. E-101 started its take-off, and everything was in order. E-102 was behind it, starting its take-off; E-103 was taxiing toward the take-off point, and E-104 prepared for taxiing. Suddenly E-101 started to climb steeply, lost power and crashed to the ground, the engines running until impact - the plane was full of fuel which exploded almost instantly.

Miraculously, seven men survived the crash - one airman and six paratroopers. The ground crew and the paratroopers of the second wave started the rescue, but exploding ammunition and fuel kept them from evacuating the wounded survivors. The operation was stopped and the accident reported to Army Command. The second in command,



**Major Árpád v. Bertalan, CO of the 1st Independent Parachute Company/Battalion.**

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Captain Imre Majthényi survived the crash, but was wounded, so command was taken over by 1st Lt. Zoltán Kiss, who recommended to carry on with the operation for both military reasons and for morale.

The paratroopers, however, were shocked and lethargic from the disaster. The death-toll was sixteen paratroopers and four members of the Air Force; seven men survived, however two died in hospital due to severe burns. Another four managed to get out of the plane but were engulfed by the flames and burned to death.


1st Lt. Kiss recommended carrying out the mission with three transport planes - two drops with slightly reduced numbers and loads. At 19:00 hours the order was given for take-off - the three SM-75s headed to the target area, however, E-102 lagged behind with engine problems. The detailed maps were lost with the crashed SM-75 which made navigation difficult. The first two planes dropped their paratroopers three minutes before the drop zone at the height of 200 metres. The last plane dropped its paratroopers when they saw the white canopies already at the drop zone. The paratroopers landed

fifteen to twenty kilometres away from the target, and clashed with Serbian forces around a farm house, losing two men and three wounded. Later the paratroopers joined the units of the Mobile Corps and the second wave was cancelled. The 2nd Paratrooper Company was deployed by truck to take part in the operation.

An investigation finally came to the conclusion that mechanical failure caused the deadly plane crash, which happened because of improper winter storage of the SM-75 transport planes. This proved to be the last combat drop done by Hungarian paratroopers during World War II.

On July 5th, 1941 the Transport Squadron carried out a supply drop over the Carpathian Mountains in support of land forces at the Eastern Front. A selected group of nine paratroopers escorted and jumped with the canisters to recover them after the mission.

During the rest of the Second World War, Hungarian paratroopers were deployed as land forces from the Carpathians to Western Hungary, and in operations in defence of the homeland

in 1944 and 1945, as part of the famous St. László Division commanded by General Zoltán v. Szügyi. 



**General Zoltán v. Szügyi later took command of the 1st Independent Parachute Battalion.**

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PRIVATE COLLECTION

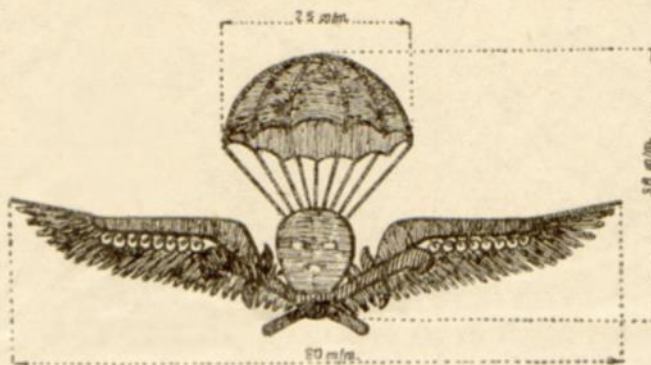


## EJTŐERNYŐS CSAPATJELVÉNY

Tisztek részére:  
a léggömb és a szárnyak  
aranyfonalból, a balálfőj  
és az alatta lévő kardok  
ezüst fonalból.

(Eredeti nagyság.)

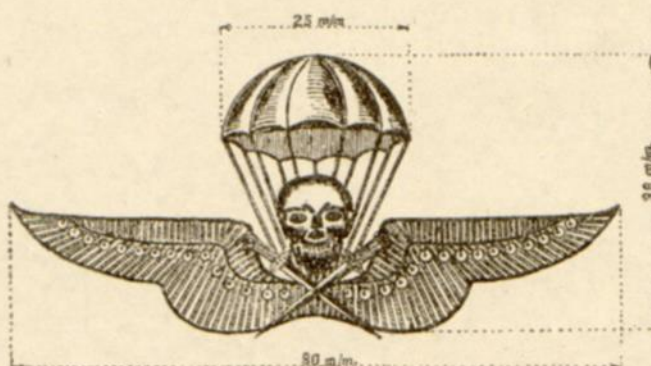
Altisztek részére:  
az egész ezüst fonalból.



## EJTŐERNYŐS CSAPATJELVÉNY

Legénység részére.

(Eredeti nagyság)



## EJTŐERNYŐS ÜGYESSÉGI JELVÉNY

(Eredeti nagyság)





# Hungarian Parachute Troop and Qualification Insignia, 1939-1945

by Gergely Pál Sallay

The soldiers of the first Hungarian parachute unit, set up in September 1938, wore the uniform of the infantry troops all through the Second World War, though subordinated to the Hungarian Air Force. Thus, they laid claim to special insignia of distinction, to differentiate them from “ordinary” infantrymen. The Ministry of Defence made the first plans to regularise troop and qualification badges for the parachutists in May 1939, while the final versions of the badges were published in March 1940, in the pages of the *Defence Gazette* (facing page).

The troop badge, embroidered for officers and NCOs, and made of metal for enlisted men, could be earned after four parachute jumps. The qualification badge was of uniform design, i.e. enamelled metal, for officers, NCOs and men alike, and it was awarded after 25 jumps. Troop badges were worn above the right breast pocket of the tunic, whereas qualification badges were worn on the right breast pocket.

There were several variations of the badges, many versions of which are preserved in both public and private collections, among others, the Numismatic Collection of the Hungarian Military History Museum.

It seems that the well-known chromium-plated troop badges, the basic material of which can be either iron or bronze, were used from the beginning, i.e. the spring of 1940, while the originally standardised bronze badges, smaller and different in design, remained only prototypes, made in late 1939 or early 1940. According to certain opinions, however, the latter type was distributed towards the end of the war.

*Text continued on page 12...*



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**Above:**

**The bronze version of the Troop Badge for other ranks. The graphic image of this type was published in *Honvédségi Közlöny* or *Defence Gazette* (pictured on the facing page) in March 1940, but it seems that the larger, chrome-plated variant was used as well, right from the beginning.**

**A miniature stickpin version is also pictured.**

**Right: Lance Corporal Miklós Magyar wearing the chrome-plated Troop Badge for other ranks, above the right breast pocket of his tunic, in 1941.**



HUNGARIAN MILITARY HISTORY INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

# 1. sz. ábra

a 31.656./eln.kik.1939. számhoz.



## Ejtőernyős csapatjelvény.

Hordmód: a jobb zseb felett közvetlenül.

Kivitel: Tiszteknek arany himzés zöld hajtóka posztón.

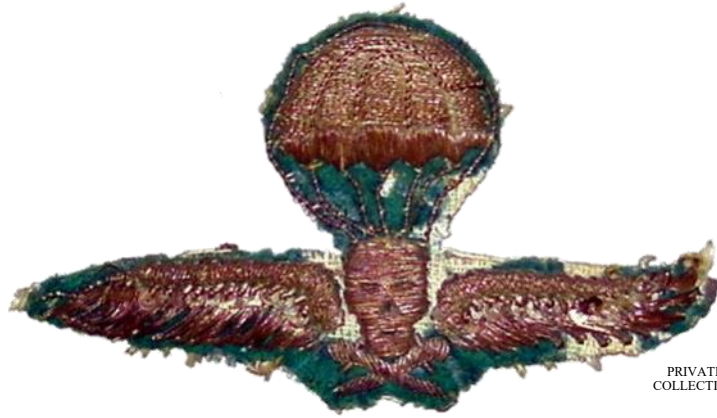
Hiv. altiszteknek ezüst

Legénységnek ezüst, nem oxidálódó fémből préselve.

The accepted design of the embroidered Troop Badge for officers and NCOs from 1939 -  
a period document preserved by the Military History Archives, Budapest

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**Troop Badge for officers incorporating gold thread and wire embroidery on green wool backing. The wings are traditionally accentuated with sequins. Badges for NCOs were embroidered in silver.**

**1 - 2: chrome-plated versions of the Troop Badge for other ranks. The skull and daggers are made of brass. A serial number was often stamped into the prongs on the reverse of this type of badge.**

1



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3



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**3: Chrome-plated Troop Badge without a serial number - the spaces between the shroud lines have not been cut out on this example.**



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**Sergeant Miklós Magyar, wearing the Qualification Badge on his right breast pocket and the embroidered version of the Troop Badge for NCOs above it, in 1943.**



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**Above:  
Obverse and reverse of  
the Qualification Badge**



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HISTORY INSTITUTE  
AND MUSEUM

**Left:  
Badly burned Qualification Badge  
that purportedly belonged to Árpád  
Bertalan, first commander of the  
Parachute Company (then a battalion).  
The Hungarian Military History  
Institute and Museum acquired it  
from the former Hungarian Aero  
Museum in Oshawa, Canada.  
It was labelled as being the badge  
worn by Major Bertalan on the day  
of the tragic accident in 1941.**

**Facing page:  
The accepted design of the  
Qualification Badge from 1939 -  
a period document preserved  
by the Military History  
Archives, Budapest.**



## 2. sz. ábra

a 31.656./eln.kik.1939. számhoz.



## Ejtőernyő ügyességi jelvény.

Kivitel: tisztek és legénység részére egyforma kivitelben, sárga fém emailrozva, cserélhető számjegyekkel.

25 ugrás után adományoztatik.

Hordmód: a jobb mellzseb közepén.

MOTORTÉHÉLNY LEVELTÁR  
TULAJDONA


...continued from page 7

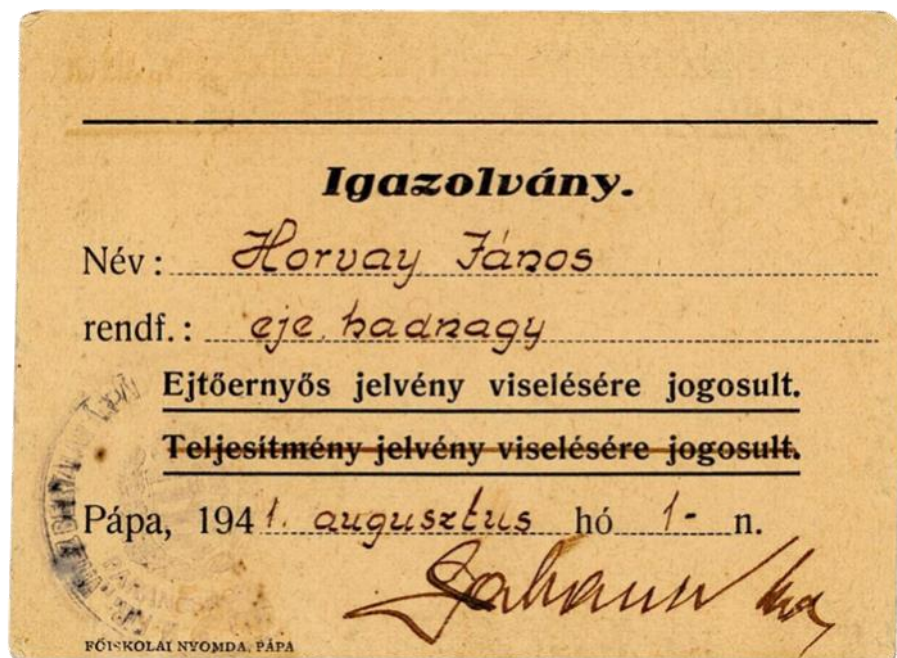
The chromium-plated troop badges were attached to the uniform with two prongs, and a serial number was stamped into one of those. No maker's mark appears on these badges. Insignia with the stamped mark of the well-known Budapest-based manufacturer József Morzsányi are modern-day copies.

The qualification badges were also worn from the spring of 1940, which is confirmed both by period photographs and archival sources, as well as personal bequests. These badges were manufactured by another Budapest-based manufacturer, the firm of Károly Jerouschek. Parachute qualification insignia were bronze gilt, and enamelled; unlike most troop badges, these were not numbered but a maker's mark was sometimes stamped on either the reverse or one of the two prongs.

A certificate was issued to the recipient entitling him to wear the insignia, which included the name and rank of the wearer, the serial number of the badge, a commander's signature and a stamp. Various types of this document exist, typically a small printed card of 8 - 10cm by 10 - 12cm, with blank spaces to be filled in by hand or typed.

Miniature versions of the troop badge were also manufactured and could be purchased privately. These either have a pin or a buttonhole fitting on the reverse.

Beside their identification function, the troop badges and the qualification badges also represented the esprit de corps and the pride of the soldiers in the elite parachute unit, and were widely used as symbols by the paratroopers. 



**Left:**  
Certificate issued to  
Parachute Troop Lieutenant  
János Horvay.

A common Hungarian practice is to indicate two grades of a badge on one document, and then the badge not earned is crossed out.

The Troop Badge is listed above the Qualification Badge, the latter having a line drawn through it.

These small certificates would be carried with a soldier's personal papers to verify his entitlement to the particular insignia.

**Right:**  
This card was issued to Senior Corporal Miklós Balogh of the Royal Hungarian Defence Forces' Parachute Troop Company at Pápa, on August 3rd, 1940.

In this case, neither badge is crossed out, indicating the likelihood of Corporal Balogh being entitled to both.





Right:  
Document issued to Private Gáspár Kürti entitling him to wear the Troop Badge.

The stamp at the top tells us that he served in the 2nd Company of the 1st Parachute Troop Battalion, now named after their recently fallen commander, Árpád v. Bertalan.

M. kir. „vitész Bertalan Árpád” 1. honvéd ejtőernyős zászlóalj  
2. század.

**Igazolvány.**

Név: *Kürti Gáspár*  
rendf.: *honv. 406. 959. sz.*

Ejtőernyős jelvény viselésére jogosult.  
Teljesítmény jelvény viselésére jogosult.

Pápa, 194 *1. október* hó *25.*-én.

*M. K. Kürti*

FŐISK. NYOMDA. PÁPA.

M. KIR. HONVÉD EJTŐERNYŐS SZÁZAD.

**IGAZOLVÁNY.**

Név: *Pehl György*  
rendf.: *honv. 1405. sz.*

Ejtőernyős jelvény viselésére jogosult.

Pápa, 194 *2.* XI. hó *27.* n.

*György Pehl*

FŐISKOLAI NYOMDA. PÁPA.

Left:  
Certificate for Private György Pehl issued on November 27th, 1942 in Pápa, the location of the standardized paratrooper school since 1940.

This example only lists the Troop Badge, and its serial number 1405 is noted.

Right:  
This document from 1944 indicates that Private István Kusnyerik was a member of the Engineer Company of the 1st Parachute Battalion and was entitled to wear the Parachute Troop Badge.

M. kir. „vitész Bertalan Árpád” 1. honvéd ejtőernyős  
zászlóalj árkász század.

**Igazolvány.**

Név: *Kusnyerik István*  
rendf.: *honvéd*

Ejtőernyős jelvény viselésére jogosult.

Pápa, 194 *4.* március hó *6.* n.

*István Kusnyerik*

FŐISK. NYOMDA. PÁPA.





PÉTER V. LABORC COLLECTION

Above: "Perfect landing."  
Below: "Critical situation."



PÉTER V. LABORC COLLECTION

Above: "We'll be there shortly."  
Below: "Stork: What kind of a bird is this?"



PÉTER V. LABORC COLLECTION



PÉTER V. LABORC COLLECTION

Whimsical period postcards reflecting Hungary's fascination with the parachute troops.





PÉTER V. LABORC COLLECTION

Enlarged postcard (also produced as a poster) from a campaign to promote the parachute troops to Hungary's youth.



# MILITARY TREASURES

Selected Artefacts  
from the Hungarian  
Military History Institute  
and Museum in  
Its Centenary Year

HADTÖRTÉNETI  
1918-2018

100

