

HUNGARIAN PRISONERS-OF-WAR

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FRENCH CAPTIVITY

1945 - 1947

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HUNGARIAN PRISONERS-OF-WAR **IN FRENCH CAPTIVITY**

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I. French-Hungarian Relations **during the Second World War**

After the June 27, 1941 declaration of war against the Soviet Union, Hungary drifted deeper and deeper into the war. On December 7th Great Britain declared war on Hungary and on December 13th, the Hungarian government declared war on the USA.

Hungary never entered into hostilities with France, partly because after June 22nd, 1940 the previously accepted France no longer existed, and partly Hungary's interests dictated to maintain the traditional Hungarian-French friendship. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were kept up; the French institutions, such as the Alliance Francaise and the French Lycee continued to function. In the wake of the historic events, new important forms of cooperation developed between the two countries.

Beginning with the second half of 1940. a considerable number of soldiers and labourers escaped from the German prisoner-of-war and forced-labour camps that were located near the Hungarian borders. Contemporary sources estimate their number to be around 1,200.

The main motive for this escape was the trust inspired by the official and social treatment Hungary accorded to the Polish refugees that became well-known even in the German prisoner-of-war camps. The Hungarian government entrusted the care of these refugees to the 9th Division of the Interior Ministry and the 21st Division of the

Defense Ministry. Surpassing the stipulations of the Geneva Convention, these entities gave humane care to the Polish and French refugees, as well as to those of other nationalities that followed them later.

Germany's protests and attempts at interference made it more difficult to look after this multinational and polyglot crowd. The government's task was further complicated by the fact that many of these refugees wanted to go on to rejoin the armies that fought the Germans in the Middle East, in North Africa, or France herself. The government looked at these attempts with good will and supported them.

The government established camps for the transient and resident refugees but did not limit their freedom of movement. Their livelihood was assured, in essence, by the soldiers' pay and the civilian aid payments that were given them; furthermore, they could accept work that corresponded to their profession. Several taught at the Gymnazium (latin highschool) in Godollo or the Eotvos College; others did research work at the Teleki Pal Institute and many became French tutors in families. Some others did literary translations or edited a newspaper. Their amateur theatre troupes entertained the Hungarian public with performances of French classical dramas. Six well-known researchers received a stipend of 600 pengos each.

Hungarian society received and accepted the French refugees with great sympathy. They were invited to most social functions, developed friendships and long-term relationships; some even married Hungarian girls.

A particularly stirring event was the celebration on July 14, 1943, the anniversary of the French Revolution, at Balatonboglar in the French camp. That year, this was the only celebration in Europe, with a parade led by Col. Hallier, the French military attache, in the presence of Hungarian military and civilian notables.

The Frenchmen established contact with the Hungarian resistance too. They helped plan and participated in the execution of several actions of sabotage. With Hungarian help, over a hundred Frenchmen escaped into Slovakia, there to join up with the partisans. Their example was followed by many Hungarians. Col.

Hallier had planned the creation of an international brigade to help the Regent in his attempts at a separate peace. He also counted on the assistance in this action of the Polish refugees.

After October 15, 1944 when the far-right government came to power, some high-ranking officers in the Defense Ministry warned the French about the dangers they were facing. This enabled many of them to go into hiding and thus avoid capture.

During the last months of the war, the de Gaulle Committee functioned illegally at the French embassy with the express purpose of furthering the return of the French refugees. Once the hostilities ceased, it took over the diplomatic representation of the country; it also took action for the improvement of the lot of Hungarian prisoners-of-war in French camps.

The relationships established during the vicissitudes of wartime did not end then. The generation that returned from Hungary continued at home its action for the improvement of the Hungarian captives. Their organization, the "Amicale des Evades Francais en Hongrie", addressed a memorandum to General de Gaulle, alerted the International Red Cross, initiated a press campaign, wrote letters to the camp commanders asking them to conduct a review of the Hungarians' situation. Thanks to these efforts, from the spring of 1946 on, there was great improvement in the lot of the Hungarian captives; their status was upgraded to that of the free workers and soon their return would be discussed.

It was in clear violation of international law that France kept over ten thousand Hungarians as prisoners-of-war. The French had no moral basis for this action: for, aside from their not having declared war on each other, no Hungarian soldier shot at a French soldier, no Hungarian pilot bombed French cities destroying houses, and no Hungarian took French prisoners. Despite all this, the French put the Hungarian captives to work as if they had caused the damage. For their work, they either got paid, or not - mostly not. Yet to this day it never occurred to anybody at least to apologize to the relatives of those that died as a consequence of the terrible conditions at the camps, or to those who survived them and who will forever remember their disappointment in the French: this is not the French people we respected! We never provoked or deserved this treatment!

II. The Fate of the Hungarian Army

after October 15, 1944

Once the Arrow-Cross Party came to power, the government was determined to fill the ranks of the army. As a result of the draft and "total mobilization", about 1 million men carried arms at that time. As the Soviet troops had crossed the Hungarian borders as delineated by the peace treaty of Trianon on September 24, 1944, the three fighting armies conducted their "defensive actions" on Hungarian soil. The government sent to Austria and Germany the reserves, the armies' supply forces, and about 60,000 cadets in the hope that they will form the nucleus of a new army.

At the beginning of April, 1945 the fighting units were pushed out of the country and from that moment on they headed West on purpose to avoid capture by the Soviet forces. Thus, during the last few months of the war, all over Germany were Hungarian army units, either settled in or still moving towards the West.

In December 1944, with the occupation of Aachen, the Allies stepped on German soil. After some rest, they launched a three-pronged attack for the occupation of Germany. They made prisoners-of-war of those Hungarian army units that they found in their way. The commander-in-chief of the army capitulated to the Americans on May 1, 1945 in Tann, Bavaria.

In the end, there were 300- to 350,000 Hungarian soldiers and cadets that were captured by the British and American forces. It is estimated that about 700,000 were made the captives of the Soviet armies.

The French role in the final stages of the war must be mentioned separately since it touched directly our soldiers.

On January 31, 1945 on the Island of Malta, Roosevelt and Churchill coordinated their military plans for the last part of the war. They assigned no role to France in these plans. Yet in the second half of April, the 1st army of Gen. Lattre de Tassigny arrived on

German territory from the South and occupied some land around the Lake Boden. It so happened that some remnants of the Hungarian army (such as the 55th anti-aircraft unit from Szeged and the mountain troops of Miskolc) found themselves facing French troops and about 7,000 Hungarians became French prisoners-of-war. (For the record, French sources put at 280,000 the number of prisoners-of-war captured outright, including those that became their captives in the course of the "war of liberation").

III. Hungarians in French captivity

France finished the second world war on the side of the victors but her situation, at the end of the war, was dire. Destructive armies swept twice through her territory. Not only did the country have to be rebuilt but the wounds that French honour suffered had to be healed. Gen. de Gaulle's endeavours were focussed on the need for an adequate supply of manpower for this re-building. He also wanted France to be, together with the British and the Americans, part of the process of Germany's pacification and de-nazification. In February, 1945 it was decided to give France 1,750,000 prisoners-of-war for this re-building; this decision was based on the principle that whatever Germany destroyed she should rebuild.

The Allied Powers made their second major decision at the conference in Yalta but it was not carried out until June. They granted France powers to occupy certain territories in Austria and Germany. This meant that any prisoner-of-war camps on these territories automatically came under the control of de Gaulle's army.

However, before transferring these camps, the British and Americans re-grouped their inhabitants in order not to have to transfer the German prisoners that were residents of their zones of occupation. This enabled them to organize their release more efficiently. In addition to the reconstruction of France, the Allies had another overwhelming interest in mind: namely, to secure for Germany's inhabitants the minimal necessities of life. Therefore, they wanted to free as soon as possible those prisoners who were agricultural labourers or workers in certain key industries.

Selecting those prisoners that were to be transferred was left to chance. And "chance" favoured the Germans as they filled the leading positions in the camps. They could exert some influence on "chance", thus putting all the non-German prisoners at a disadvantage. As a result of this "chance", some 60-70 thousand Hungarians were transferred to French captivity from the British or the Americans.

In the Austrian territory ceded to France the Hungarian prisoners were lucky in that the territory's commanding officer, Lt. Gen. Emile Marie Bethuart, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, did not consider them as prisoners-of-war but as internees. He also had a personal reason for doing so: he owed a debt of gratitude to his former colleague in Belgrade, Vasvary Jozsef, for helping his family escape at the beginning of the German onslaught against Yugoslavia. However, he could not stop the recruiters who, with some promise or other, lured thousands of young Hungarians to join the Foreign Legion.

In the French zone of Germany, Gen. Pierre Koenig was not that tolerant. He maintained his position that "unconditional surrender" meant, for the prisoners, deprivation of all their rights; thus they could not demand application of the Geneva Convention. As a result, the prisoners of all other nations received the same treatment as the Germans. It must be mentioned here, though, that 3-4 months after the armistice, no differentiation was made between the nationalities of the prisoners, nor were they registered personally. The question of nationality became interesting only when some countries, such as Czechoslovakia - who counted themselves on the side of the victors - started inquiring about their citizens.

The 7,000 Hungarians who were captured by the French "in their own right" along the shores of Lake Boden found themselves in a peculiar position. Their treatment was haphazard. Some were sent on to labour camps in France; the others were treated in the same manner as the Russian forced-labourers who were considered refugees and awaited shipment home. This situation made some trickery possible. The most determined ones escaped; others obtained American IDs and went home with them. The remainder received permission to work and move freely within a 30 km. strip, a privilege of which they made good use.

Those prisoners that were obliged to spend time in the camps of Friedrichshafen and Bregenz found the treatment and attitude of the French soldiers tolerable but suffered a great deal from the brutality of the colonial troops. The Poles, whenever they assured the camps' guard, were understanding and helpful.

Food supplies, even in the workplace, were scant and monotonous.

They only received wages for their labour from 1946 on. The last event before their return home was the night spent in Strasbourg, where they were lodged in the dungeons of the fortress, on musty straw, without any comfort, awaiting the departure of the liberating train.

Some Hungarians found themselves in the French zone of Germany and spent time in such large French-controlled camps along the Rhine as Mainz, Remagen, Sinzig, Bad-Kreuznach, Bretzenheim, and Bingen-Dietersheim, to name just the most notorious. These camps, surrounded by barbed-wire and guard-towers, open to the elements, contained several thousand prisoners characterized as "transients". Camp slang liked to describe the camps with one word: the Rhineland camps earned the adjective "muddy"; Bad-Kreuznach and Bretzenheim became the "Valley of Tears"; while the later ones, such as Brienne-le-Chateau was nicknamed "The Louse-Palace", Attichy the "Hungercamp", Poitiers and Dieppe the "Deathcamps". These nicknames were based on the most vivid memories of the camps.

The inhabitants of these camps were extremely varied. The victorious powers put into camp anyone they could catch from Kriegshelferinen, Hungarian army nurses, the children and old parents of the Volksturm, the Hungarian cadets and railroad-men (they, too, wore some sort of uniform) to the wounded and the lame. This hodge-podge of camp inmates was transferred to the French.

These transfers were to the Hungarians' advantage in one thing only: the French tried to eliminate "camping under the stars", i.e. in the open. This in June-July 1945. There were some groups of prisoners that got a roof over their heads in August only - since April! The solution to the problem was simple: they closed the camp and removed the inhabitants to the interior of France. Some camps remained; such as Bretzenheim where the prisoners were allowed to build their own barracks.

They were transported by railroad in open wagons. To the loading station and from the point of arrival to their camp, the men were marched in rows of five, all the while accompanied by the guards' shouts of "Allez vite!" On German territory the population's

sympathy and helpfulness were palpable but any offer of assistance was rather brusquely refused by the guards. On French territory, the population gave all manner of expression to the hatred and anger of their defeated enemies. The prisoners were spat upon and had stones thrown at them. At a suburban station near Paris, a young boy armed with a huge stick constantly hit the waiting prison transport and yelled: "Boche kaput!" A passenger train pulled onto the parallel rails; the people in it urged the youngster on enthusiastically while spitting upon the prisoners. Unmentionable epithets filled the air. Onto another train of open wagons someone threw an iron bar from an overhead passage, killing one prisoner and wounding others.

Elsewhere a mechanic (with a sense of humour) let the water meant to refill the locomotives run onto the prisoners in their slowly moving train to the great glee of the populace. Thus, each and every one of them tried to exact revenge for some injury inflicted by the Germans during the occupation. The traditional enmity between the two peoples also played a role: the spirit of "revanche" was alive and well.

In his book published in 1998, K.I. described a tragic incident that occurred during a march. On August 14, 1945, the French transferred 12,000 prisoners, among them 8,000 Hungarians, from Bingen to Mainz, by marching them the distance of 15 km. On their way, the prisoners noticed a field of turnips; they all jumped ranks and started gathering them in. "Since they were many, they pulled them out of one another's hands. The guards, at first, fired into the air to bring the crazed men back to the road. But this was in vain; the men just kept running about the turnip field. Then the guards in Jeeps started firing their machine guns in front of the men in the hope that the earth they churned up would stop them. Since this did not have the desired effect either, they brought their strafing closer, occasionally hitting someone crawling up front. This action lasted some 15 minutes and caused many deaths among the Hungarians.

IV. CAMPS AND CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS

James Bacque, Canadian author and an expert on the question of prisoners-of-war, estimates that there were about 1,600 camps in France. According to the prisoner-of-war management, there were 80 where Hungarians were also held. However, this seems inaccurate as during my research some 140 names of camps were mentioned. This divergence illustrates the difficulties that a researcher into French - and generally Western - captivity must face.

There are very few documents on this topic in the archives available to Hungarian researchers. Special literature on this subject does not single out the Hungarian prisoners. There is nothing left, therefore, but to question the prisoners themselves. This poses other problems. Most prisoners can only revive the memories of past events: their documents were lost, confiscated by the former regime or were destroyed by the prisoners themselves - out of fear or precaution. Fortunately, original (not reconstructed) diaries have surfaced and books that could be considered reliable source material were also published. In the course of my research I personally interviewed several hundred prisoners-of-war; many of them summarized their experiences in writing. This enabled me to compare the summaries that pertained to the same place and same event. The names of places gave me the most problems: the prisoners, not being familiar with foreign languages, could neither orally nor in writing give me accurate geographic names that I could use for comparison. Fifty years have passed between the recollected events and the revival of their memory. It is undoubtedly true that memories can fade in such a long time; it is also true that the personal emotions have calmed down and the events were viewed not through the beautifying mist of distance but with an attempt at objectivity.

Ever since one can freely talk in Hungary of the events of the Second World War and its consequences, there is much comparison among the treatments at the various western prisoner-of-war camps. The Americans were easy-going and unpredictable; the British were correct and generous; the French were like the Soviets except that

the captivity did not last as long.

Should we want to discuss the conditions in the French camps: hunger, the infestation of lice and the diseases were made doubly worse by the obvious hatred, the spirit of "revanche" that found expression in constant humiliation of human dignity. At Saint Jean d'Angely, a sergeant on duty ran through the barracks in the morning, whipping the prisoners awake delivering a monologue about how he, himself, was a prisoner of the Germans at the same camp, how he was treated in the same way by the Germans, and how he is now paying them back.

In his book, "Historique du Service des Prisonniers-de-guerre de l'Axe" published in 1948, Gen. Buisson, commander-in-chief of all prisoner-of-war camps, explains away the highly criticized conditions at the camps by saying that they were what could be expected under the circumstances.

Granted that France was in ruins, her economy destroyed, her inhabitants rebellious. Still, all valuables of the prisoners did not have to be confiscated during their frisking (sanctioned by the Geneva Convention) nor seven youngsters at camp No. 105 at Strasbourg flogged publicly for stealing some potatoes in their hunger. It was not necessary to keep the weakened prisoners standing for hours on the Appelplatz with the excuse of controlling their numbers. It is a pity that the Red Cross could not live up to its mission. In some camps the prisoners never even heard of the existence of the Red Cross during their whole stay. It is a different matter that some of the aid or the donations never reached their destination but ended up on the black market. For this reason the commander of the camp at Poitiers, for instance, was relieved of his duties. At Saint Jean d'Angely, lacking other accommodations, the prisoners ordered to office duties were sitting on sealed boxes containing Red Cross shipments. The smart ones pilfered them. The non-commissioned French officer explained that these were received under the German occupation when French prisoners were there and therefore were not intended for the present prisoners. Naturally the clerical staff could no longer enter the office-barracks.

From what the former prisoners said, it would appear that the conditions in the camps were bad but varied. They depended to a

great extent on the camp commander's good will and on how he could handle the German "Stammpersonal" (basic personnel). In some cases the opposite occurred: the Stammpersonal influenced the commander. The craftsmen/artisans, particularly the tailors, that found themselves in the camp, were in great demand and could do many favours for the French through the intermediary of the Stammpersonal. The "atelier de couture" at Poitiers, for instance, made a series of women's suits out of American blankets. There can be no doubt as to their final destination.

From July 1945 on, in the corral No. 6 of the camp at Voves, 1,100 Hungarians were mixed in with the Germans. The corral's commander hated the Hungarians, no one knows why. When introduced, he made beautiful promises but never missed an opportunity to make his power felt. A few days after our arrival, 14 can-openers and 6 bars of American soap were missing from the kitchen. The Lagerfuhrer (camp leader) naturally suspected the Hungarians of this theft and declared that the corral shall receive no food until these valuables were found. What could we do but make up the loss from our own stores. It was not too hard as we managed to save a few of these pieces from the supplies the Americans sent that we had carefully hidden during the searches.

The officer in charge established quite a court for himself. It was composed of young Hungarian men eager to serve. It had a cobbler, a tailor, a barber, a draftsman, an orderly, and even a gypsy clarinetist. In the hope of getting extra food, these worthies watched for every wish of the big boss. There also were in this court some men of German origin from around Budapest; these acted as intermediaries with the French in their business.

All this begs the question: didn't these conditions attract attention or could they not be mentioned to someone of authority? The reply to this lies in the fact that the prisoners lost all their rights under the terms of unconditional surrender. The actions of the Red Cross were limited which made its protesting, as an institution, impossible. The complaints of the prisoners themselves only reached some subordinate officers and stopped there. Those Frenchmen who had direct contact with the prisoners had no idea who the Hungarians were. As soon as we mentioned our capital, Budapest, to elicit some faint knowledge, they immediately talked about Bucharest. Some

more conscientious Frenchmen tried to explain our presence by maintaining that, after all, we joined the Wehrmacht voluntarily and therefore we had to share its fate.

It is worth noting how the higher-ranking French officers viewed the situation and their subalterns' behaviour. Their opinion varied greatly and many tried to find excuses, as we can see from the declaration of Gen. Buisson. A high-ranking French officer told Kulifay Imre, pastor of the Hungarian protestant mission in Paris, that the career officers did not take part in the plunder of the Hungarians. In Poitiers a guard shot in the night a prisoner who, half asleep, looked for the latrines. The major brushed away our protest by saying that the Hungarians cause a lot of trouble.

At the end of July 1945 the Hungarian captives at the camp at Voves - among them the cadets of the Artillery School at Hajmasker - were transferred to St. Jean d'Angely. At that time, the about 800 cadets were properly attired, in impeccable Hungarian uniforms. On Sunday, July 29th, the camp commander ordered them to take baths. They were to undress at one end of the bath-house and get their clothes back at the other after the bath. In the meanwhile, the clothes were taken away to be "disinfected". In vain did the boys wait for their clothes - they never came back. Instead came dirty, ragged - and naturally - lousy German and Italian uniforms that they had to wear. They looked more like scarecrows than soldiers. The reply to the long and protracted complaining was that the Hungarian uniform looked too much like the French for the prisoners to wear them. Within a few days the "maquis" guards who, until then served in civilian clothes, started strutting around in Hungarian uniforms. That much for credibility. It must be mentioned in this connection that at the change of clothes not everybody got a shirt - or, if they did, it was the wrong size and could not be worn. Therefore, some of the cadets appeared at the flag-raising ceremony and parade dressed in trousers only. Which provoked the camp commander to comment to the pastor of the Paris protestant mission that "the Hungarian lacked manners".

These actions, the necessary exchanges, not to mention the usual wear and tear of the clothes made the Hungarians blend in with the remaining "feldgrau" (dirt grey) masses. It would have been useful, though, had the various nationalities been given outward

expression. The Austrian-born German soldiers recognized the importance of this and wore a red-white-red ribbon ostentatiously either on their caps or jackets.

Once the territory for the French occupation was established masses of prisoners were transferred to France from the British and American camps. For their accomodation, Gen. Buisson's remark remains apt: "as can be expected in the present situaion." In that country in ruins there truly were very few buildings or accomodations offering minimal comfort. The barracks-camps established by the Germans, the available army barracks. and imdustrial buildings were all used.

In his recollections, F.K. describes how they were transferred into the French prison system from the hospital in Feldkirch. The supervising doctors quickly discharged the patients. The remainder had to endure many humiliations and privations before they were shipped to Strasbourg. There they were housed in the subterranean dungeons, sleeping on fusty straw. They received food just once a day. They became so weak they could barely stand. F.K., 173 cm. tall, weighed just 48 kg.

V.K. remembers that at Brienne-le-Chateau the prisoners were lodged in the fortified palace which was surrounded by barbed wire. The German were housed on the upper stories, the Hungarians jammed into the cellar. There were no possibilities for personal hygiene; instead, twice a day they were assembled for a head-count.

K.G. remembers being captured at Sothofen at the end of March, 1945 and being marched to the Lake Boden. In Weiden, in a burnt-out textile factory, Moroccan soldiers guarded them whence they were taken to Tutlingen. Here, in a gigantic open-air camp, about 200,000 prisoners were jammed in. They had no food or water. The guards got frequently drunk; then they would start shooting at random. It almost seemed as if they were afraid of the prisoners which made them nervous. It happened that they would shoot one by one the men sitting on the latrines.

He also desribed the conditions in a Toulouse prison. He was transferred there because he wes wrongly accused, with four of his companions, of poisoning a farmer's pigs. The prison-guards were

extremely rough with them, beating and kicking them. On top of it all, they had to watch the executions of some war-criminals.

J.J. relates: "They took us from Bad Kreuznacht to Epinal and handed us over to the French who marched us to Luneville. It was a cruel thing to do as we were very weak and many of us fell out of the line but we were not allowed to care for our companions. We had to leave them behind. As we crossed a village, the guards started to beat the men on the edge. Afterward, the officer in charge politely apologized saying that "this was the only way they could protect us from the population's anger". In Saint- Jean-d'Angely, several thousand prisoners were jammed onto the cement floors of the barracks. The French locked us in every night; for our needs, they placed a "pail" near the door. This was just the cut-off half of an oil-barrel. As no one wanted to sleep next to the "pail", there were fights every night. But the crowding was such that inevitably someone was pressed against the stinking receptacle. There was no light in there and every night, almost every minute, the quiet was broken by arguments and fights among the men who wanted to heed nature's call. One can imagine what the men who were obliged to sleep next to the receptacle looked like in the morning. Food was scarce until the end. What the Hungarians missed most was bread of which there was little.

R.L. writes: "When on July 28th the French took over the camp at Rennes, their first action was to assemble us with all our belongings and what we received from the Americans. They confiscated everything. All we had left was what we wore or carried on us. As for food: for breakfast, we received 1/2 l. of mulberry-leaf tea, for lunch 1/2 l. warm water with a few strips of lettuce- or cabbage leaves. For supper we had scrounged some coarse, greenish-yellow bread which we could eat only toasted. In the evenings, there were lots of little fires going in the camp so that we could toast the bread and roast the acorns that we gathered in the nearby forest."

Details from F.J.'s recollections: "After three months of captivity with the Americans, we got transferred to French supervision. One day we just noticed that at noon Frenchmen in civilian clothes came on as guards instead of the Americans. They gave us nothing to eat saying that they had nothing themselves. However, they let us out one by one to steal some potatoes in the farmers' nearby fields but

we were to stay within shooting distance. In exchange, we had to give clothes or shoes to the guards. I, too, exchanged clothes with one of the guards but I rued the day: instead of my good trousers, I received a pair full of lice.'

Health care was sketchy also: there were few doctors and fewer medications. Those that suffered from diarrhea - the most frequent illness - were put in the prison hospital but received no effective treatment. I am quoting from H.J.'s letter: "In the camps along the Rhine, we had neither a roof over our heads, nor any medical care. There were many deaths daily, caused by hunger or final debility. The Red Cross could not offer effective help. Using their postcards, I managed to let my parents know 4 times that I am alive."

Dr. M.K. writes that in most camps there were 1-2 people who provided medical care. These were mostly medical students, working without supplies of medication or bandages. "In the hospital in Hagenau, where I, myself, spent some time, and where German physicians cooperated, conditions were adequate. The prisoners who suffered work-related accidents were brought here."

I know of 10-15 deaths in the "one potato" camp in Bingen. Some starved to death; others, in their weakened condition, fell into the latrine and drowned.

S.B.'s report of the fate of eight 22-year old men: "In captivity, one was shot to death; one starved to death; one became ill after his return home and died within six weeks; one was in no condition to be transported home; one was dropped off the train; two came home infected with TB; and only one was healthy."

As for the prisoners' spiritual care, it is hardly worth mentioning. There were few Hungarian army chaplains and the prisoners could not communicate with the German pastors. Occasionally the pastors of the Hungarian missions would come from Paris but they could not go everywhere. In general, the prisoners tried to encourage one another but deep depressions ending in suicide were common.

Working was the only possibility to better conditions. But because of bad organization and the Germans' influence, this was not always open to the Hungarians. There were camps where they could not

work at all, except at some tasks around camp. These were pretty depressing: moving the dead, cleaning the latrines, trash-collection... On the one hand, work relieved the monotony of their barbed-wire enclosed lives, on the other it raised the odds of survival as those that worked received extra food. It also opened possibilities for wheeling and dealing and they sometimes even received wages - or at least vouchers redeemable later.

As in Baden-Baden M.K.'s weight dropped to 38 kg, he was sent to a family to improve his condition. After the successful cure he volunteered to pick up mines as the authorities promised to let anyone go home who survived a week. This, of course, came to nothing. At camp, he worked as a chauffeur - without pay, naturally.

K.L. left the camp at Fort-Corneilles-en-Parisi daily to work in the surrounding fields. According to him, ridding the fields of the mines cost many a Hungarian life or limb. He received no pay for his work.

On the other hand, O.F. did work and even received pay in the form of vouchers. However, these were confiscated from him and his companions at the screening camp at Kaposvar without any explanation.

The most fortunate prisoners received work on farms or in industry. The French farmers appreciated good workers and considered them members of the family. They even received marriage proposals.

However, the slave-market atmosphere of the workers' placement was most humiliating. The prisoners were lined up in the marketplace where the prospective employers eyed them, chose among them, felt their muscles. The chosen ones or the prisoners detailed for camp-work had to labour barefoot, or at best in clogs, to prevent escapes.

Although it sounds incredible and seemed hopeless, many tried, with little success, to escape. The French population did not sympathize with the prisoners. But to escape to the American zone was a sensible undertaking as the escapees were always repatriated. The Americans even kept an official record of the French treatment. The French punished the recaptured escapees very harshly

(sometimes even by execution) despite the Geneva Convention's express prohibition.

In the camps, the general opinion held that the rough treatment of the French was motivated by their hope to recruit the young prisoners for the Foreign Legion. It is a fact that the Legion's recruiters regularly showed up in the camps and tried to lure the young men away with attractive promises. The temptation was great, particularly during the first few months of captivity, the "starvation period". Many of our Hungarians joined for a variety of reasons. Some did not wish to go home for some shady dealings; some were fired by the spirit of adventure; and others, the rationalizers, just wanted out of the depressing camps for a little while. Those that signed up were transported to a legion base. Sooner or later many returned: some were judged unfit, others got scared of the hardships of the legionnaire's life. The numbers differ on how many Hungarians did join the Legion and how many lost their lives in Indochina or Algeria. According to Tamas Stark's well-established calculations, about 20,000 Hungarians served under the Legion's banners.

In September 1945 Gen. Eisenhower stopped the transfer of prisoners to the French. He did that once he learned of the illegalities that occurred in the French camps. The world press started writing about them; now the Red Cross also intervened more forcefully. International medical teams visited the camps and separated those who became too weak to work. Most of these were handed over to the Americans and were placed in rehabilitation camps. From that time on there was improvement in the French camps also and finally the repatriation of the Hungarian prisoners was discussed.

The Hungarian consul in Paris, Vilmos Erodi-Harrach, reported in November 1945 that although the French government does not become involved in the repatriation of the Hungarians, it wishes to ease their lot by creating Hungarians-only camps, by offering them employment possibilities, and by putting the sick prisoners into hospitals.

On March 9, 1946, Gen. Buisson informed the Hungarian delegation of the International Red Cross that the French government had decided to liberate the Hungarian prisoners. This

was to start as soon as their transport became possible across the American zone.

Beyond the ponderous bureaucracy, the prisoners received faster and more effective assistance from society. This was provided, first of all, by the Frenchmen who had fled to Hungary, the escapees, and the pastors of the Hungarian missions of Paris. The latter rescued some 160 cadets from the camp at Dieppe where they were consistently subjected to the homosexual advances of their Arab guards. These were placed in French families until the details of their repatriation was worked out. The Red Cross freed 42 cadets from Andernach in August 1945 and placed these, too, in French families.

Frere Albert, a monk of the Marist order, and Jean Cottin, an escaped lieutenant, armed with Gen. Buisson's credentials, visited the camps, took aid, and forwarded messages to the prisoners' families. The chief of the Hungarian Red Cross mission in Toulouse succeeded in liberating five prisoners languishing in the dungeons of the fortress who were convicted on fictitious charges.

There were Frenchmen who, in their own way, tried and managed to help prisoners. Mme Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, a professor of Egyptology at the Sorbonne, intervened for special treatment for her Hungarian colleague and three of his companions at the camp at Poitiers. In the small town of Petitville, in the Calvados, a teacher and a clerk at city hall together helped five Hungarian prisoners. In Saint-Jean-d'Angely chance brought an ex-refugee from Hungary to the guard. As soon as he discovered the Hungarians among the prisoners, he arranged for them to have 3 dl. milk a day to improve nutrition. A French farmer, returning from his orchard in the evenings, would throw a hatful of plums over the barbed wire.

There are countless little incidents like these in the diaries and journals. They seem insignificant, yet, at the time and under those conditions, they could save a life. They prove that in and around those prisoner-of-war camps, cruelty did not reign supreme.

The repatriation of the Hungarian prisoners did finally start in March 1946 and ended, to all practical purposes, at the end of 1947. From

that time on, prisoners showed up only sporadically at the screening camp at home.

V. THOSE WHO DID NOT RETURN...

The Second World War produced some, hitherto unknown phenomena of warfare. The consequences of some of these can still be felt in society.

One of these is that the belligerent countries had more civilian losses than military. It is strange that an accurate count of these civilian casualties is still not available; all there is are estimations. These well-founded estimations are good for establishing parameters but are not satisfactory to families who don't know where their loved ones are resting.

In Hungary's case the new phenomenon is that most of the military and civilian fatalities are buried outside of our borders and the final resting place of many is unknown.

The Hungarian prisoners' French captivity only lasted one or one-and-a-half years. But many of them died during that time as a result of fighting, bombing raids, epidemics caused by the primitive conditions of the camps, sporadic medical care, personal tragedies (shootings and suicides). The dead were buried someplace around the camp, in marked - sometimes unmarked - temporary graves.

In the 1950s, on the basis of an agreement with France, the German Popular Association for the Care of Military Graves, created in 1919, searched out the tombs and burial places that they could find, opened them up, identified the remains and saw to it that they were reburied in military graveyards in northern France or Germany, without regard to their nationalities. At the same time, they organized a record-keeping and information service too. This is how the scattered remains of the Hungarian war dead ended up in these beautifully planned and maintained military cemeteries. Unfortunately, 10 years after the end of the war and the prisoners' captivity it was impossible to find every grave and to identify all the remains. Therefore we could only find partial listings on the cemetery records of those prisoners who had died in France. We suspect that many were buried in mass graves of the unknown dead.

The question of how many men lost their lives in French captivity is justified. As it became apparent earlier, the answer is not easy as most counts are based on approximations. In his book Never again war..., dr. Papp Tibor writes: "No exact count is available of their numbers. According to some estimations, they numbered in the ten thousand." (This applies to all prisoners-of-war in western captivity.)

The starting point for an educated guess of the number of prisoners who died in France could be the data on Hungarian soldiers buried in France collected by the German Popular Association for the Care of Military Graves. The organization declared that it did not have a complete list as, in the course of finding the graves and reburying the dead, they were unable to locate every tomb and identify every body. The fact that during the last stages of the war several Hungarian units were under German command and received German identification numbers complicates the issue. There were prisoner-of-war camps under French supervision in Germany also and those who died there were buried in German cemeteries.

The French themselves are uncertain about the mortality numbers. The prisoner-of-war administration set the mortality rate at 2.4%. German researcher doubt this figure and contrast it with the 3.5% mortality rate at the camp at Rheinwiesen. To paper over these contradictions, the French invented the new statistical theory of "perdus pour raisons diverses" (lost for various reasons.)

One must not forget that in the autumn of 1945 the Americans took over several thousand weakened and ill prisoners, some of whom could not be saved. Their death improved French statistics. To further complicate matter, the French declared that they were not responsible for the death of prisoners who were already ill or wounded when captured.

In Hungary herself, only the prisoners' recollections are available but these are not very reliable as most only remember that "there were many deaths". The Hungarian losses were not recorded separately either by the French or the Germans. The only concrete fact that emerged was the declaration of some of the artillery cadets from Hajmasker who said that from April to October out of 790 cadets 70 died.

After all this, even the most conservative estimates will give a figure of 1,800 dead minimum, i.e. a mortality rate of 3%. If we contrast

this with the peace-time rate of 1/1000 applicable to this age group, one will grasp the severity of our losses.

According to the German Popular Association for the Care of Military Graves, about 400 Hungarian soldiers are recorded and buried in the graveyards listed in the annex.

For decades after the end of the war we had no means to commemorate our compatriots who died in the war. Now, thanks to the German Popular Association for the Care of Military Graves, we have the lists of the dead and the names of the cemeteries. On October 10, 1992, in Niederbronn-les-Bains, the Association of War Veterans erected in the great hall of the military cemetery a commemorative column which honours all the soldiers who died in French captivity.

Since May 26, 1992, in the hero's cemetery in Miskolc stands a memorial to all those who died in eastern or western captivity. There are always fresh flowers at the foot of this memorial signifying the respect and devotion of those who cannot go to their loved ones' actual grave. And here they say their prayers for those who never came back...

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FRENCH P.O.W. CAMPS

In Austria:

Ailingen
Bregenz
Feldkirchen
Ering
Gscheid

Muran
Rum am Innsbruck
St. Peter / Winberg
Wörgl
Lustenau

In France:

Agde
Amboise
Attichy
Auberchicourt / Nord
Avignon
Aubagne
Bar -sur-Aube
Beaune-de-Rolande
Besancon
Béthune
La Bégude
Breisac
Brevannes
Brienne-le-Chateau
Brumath
Caen
Cahors
Camp des Sables-Fortet
Camp des Anamites
Camp des Defends par Chateauroux
Espagot
Farges/Morbihen
Evron
Ferriere-la-Vorrierie
Foix

Camp de Livron
Camp de Thoré
Castres
Chalon sur Marne
Champenoise-Vigole
Chateauroux
Cherbourg
Clermont-Ferrand
Colmar
Colombes
Comper-en-Concoret
Corneille-en-Parisis
Cotentin
Damigny
Decise
Dieppe
Dijon
Dragignan
Épinal
Ergm
Montoire/Bretagne
Mulhouse-St. Louis
Mutzig
N. Orléans
Nice

Fontainebleau
Fort Moselle
Fort Corneilles
Fort de Noisy/Paris
Foucarville
Freisine
Givers
Grabyle
Grandville
Haguenau
Hatten
Hénin-Liétard
Hérault de Beziars
La Flèche
Lamballe
La Trémouille pres Tulle
Le Havre
Lens/Mericourt
Liévin/Calonne
Lille
Lisle s/Tarn
Luneville
Lyon
Markolsheim
Marseville
Märzwiller
Méricourt
Metz
Mitrachin
Montech
Montelier
Monthier-en-Der

In Germany:

Andernach
Baden-Baden
Friedrichshafen
Koblenz
Lindau

Nouvelle Annecy
Parche
Pau, Ville de
Piemont
Perpignan
Piemont
Poitiers
Pheac/S Ardour
Quieri Lamotte
Rennes
Riquevir
Rittershofen
Rivesaltes
Rouen
Saint Fons/Rhone
Saint Jean d'Angély
Saint Priest/Isere
Satonay Sausheim
Sedan
Sepmes
Sermaise-les-Bains
Sète/Hérault Montpellier
Strassbourg
Toulouse
Tours
Venissieuy par Lyon
Vernel
Vernet d'Ariege
Versailles
Villemaur
Vitry le Francois
Voves
Vuilnemin/Douai

Graffenstaden
Kehl
Offenburg
Ostheim
Saarbrücken

**LIST OF GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERIES
IN FRANCE WHERE
HUNGARIAN "POW'S" ARE ALSO RESTING**

**Mont de Hiusnes /Département Manche
Bergheim /Dép. Haut-Rhin
Niederbronn /Dép. Bas-Rhin
Solers /Dép. Seine-et-Marne
Fort de Malmaison /Dép. Aisne
Noyers-Font-Maugis /Dép. Ardennes
Andilly /Dép. Meurthe-et-Moselle
Marigni /Dép. Manche
Berneuil /Dép. Charante Maritime
Ploudaniel-Lesneven /Dép. Finistere
Dagneux /Dép. Ain
Ste Anne d'Aury Morbihan /Dép. Touraine
Lommel /Dép. Limbourg, Belgium
La Cambe /Dép. Calvados
Orglandes /Dép. Manche
St. André /Dép. Eure
Beauvais /Dép. Oise**

THE CEMETERY AT POITIERS

At the time of completing this report, only one list of the dead Hungarian "POW's" is known to us. They are buried near Poitiers, France. The list contains 62 Hungarian names. We have reason to believe, that most of the cemeteries near the camps mentioned before, hold the greaves of many hundreds of other innocent Hungarians.

Heartfelt thanks to the German War Graves Commission of Kassel, for making the list available to us.

Name	Grave No,
Abay, Aladár	1040
Ambo, István	1157
Bajkai, Imre	1420
Bart, Jenő	1335
Béres, András	1287
Berta, György	1540
Boganos, György	1501
Bottka, Lajos	1494
Csizmadia, Ferenc	1397
Buday, Mihály	1120
Dudás, Jozsef	1347
Durko, Imre	1318
Ebner, János	1155
Eördögh, Bertalan	1364
Erdős, János	1187
Fáskerty, Péter	1527
Fekete, György	1288
Gál, Károly	1196
Gombos (Gömbös?), Tibor	1218
Haido (Hajdú), Bálint	1240
Joszi, Sándor	1156
Kammel?, Béla	1239
Karsay, Ernő	1651
Kepes (Képes?), Viktor	1263
Kiss, Ferenc	1244
Kiss, Mihály	1480

Kollár, László	1341
Koltai, Károly	1340
Konyha, Lajos	1281
Ligeti, Pál László	1507
Liha, Gábor	1406
Marasztó (?), Vilmos	1468
Mihály, Antal	1421
Nagy, István	1305
Napholcz, József	1259
Páter, Miklós	1407
Parocski, Dénes	1528
Péter, Alfréd	1253
Piller, György	1203
Porkoláb, László	1458
Rosza (Rózsa?), Demeter	1215
Sallai, Antal	1183
Sanda, István	II(?)
Serester, Andor	1514
Serfözö, József	1253
Somogyvári, Jenő	1282
Szabó, Albert	1591
Szaba (Szabó?), Lajos	1197
Szantner, Jónás (János)	1217
Szöke, Sándor	1262
Szoreni (Szörényi?), Ottó	1241
Szücs, István	1205
Szuer (Szür?), József	1056
Takács, Elemér	1427
Török, Jónás (János?)	1195
Tóth, József	1513
Udvardi, József	1384
Varga, István	1271
Varga, József	1356
Vaska, Győző	1416
Weisz, István	1248
Zsóri, Gyula	1289

