

**Eötvös Loránd University**  
**Faculty of Humanities**

**Doctoral Thesis**

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**Reorganisation of the Hungarian Peoples Army between 1956–1968.**

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## I. Choise of subject

The subject of my thesis is the reorganization of the Hungarian Peoples Army (HPA) from 1956 to 1968. There are of course other possible chronological borders of this topic. Especially if we strictly look at the army on its own. For example 1953, when the forcible mass building of the HPA had ended. Or 1955, when Hungary joined the Warsaw Pact (WP), or 1960/61, when the real developement of the HPA, after the revolution started. But 1956 is such an emblematic date of the hungarian history, and the hungarian communist regime, and especially in the history of the army, that I think it's obvious to use it in this thesis, as a chronological border. The HPA collapsed, because of the soviet invasion in the 4th of November, lost it's fighting ability, so that was a *zero point*. And from this disastrous zero point, the army was rebuilt during the following years. The ending point of this rebuilding was –in my opinion– 1968, when the HPA realised its first, and only real combat duty in Czechoslovakia, which was a kind of *zenith*, a well performed exam. The Prague Spring itself, and the Hungarian role in it is not the subject of mí thesis, because it is not fitting the topic theoretically, and it would strech the thesis too much. Of course just like in the case of the starting point, there are lots of possible ending alternatives too. For example the 1972-73 period, when most of the Defence Ministry, and the rear units of the HPA were reorganised. Or 1962, when the Hungarian Air Defence Forces take the responsibility of the defence of the Hungarian air space fom the soviet Southern Group of Forces, and the HPA's first high scale military drill, with hungarian and soviet forces (Danube-62) was brought in effect. So I admit, that there could be a possible criticism, that the reorganisation of the HPA itself did not take until 1968. But I use this date as an ending point because –not mentioning the Czechoslovak occupation– the structure of the HPA reached a kind of resting point, which remained until in the beginning of the 1980s. In first months of 1967 the newly organised 3. Army Corps (in the city of Cegléd) take the two second line mechanised infantry divisions, (teh 4. and the 15.) as its subject. This act finished the creating of the structure, that remaind the HPA's structure during about one and a half decades: the for first line division of the army was subjected to the 5. Field Army, and the two second line divisions to the 3. Army Corps, the air defence forces was organised into the 1. Air Defence Army with two air defence divisions. On the other hand I chose this cronological border because I think that the cronological borders of the thesis have to be compared with widely known historical events. 1968 is the year of

the beginning of the Hungarian New Economic Mechanism, and of course the Prague Spring. The army was a vital subject of the Hungarian state, and the Soviet-Hungarian relationship. And it is also important, that during this period, lots of young Hungarian man served in the army as conscripts, and took vital experiences and picked up social behaviour models.

## **II. The objectives of the thesis**

The chapters of the thesis makes thematic blocks. In the historiographical chapter I tried to overlook the bibliography of the topic. I have to underline that I looked into only the works which are strictly related to the military question of the subject. The bibliography of the Hungarian history since 1945, or the Cold War were not the subject of my study. In the next chapter I surveyed the antecedents from 1945, especially the period 1948–1956. because the system which was made during those years in some aspect lived through the next period. For example the low military knowledge and intellectual level of the great masses of the officer corps, and partly because of this, the unsatisfactory level of the military schools, and institutes, the outdated weaponry and equipment, the foundation of the Warsaw Pact, the shock of 1956, and so on. The question is, how, and in which scale lived these symptoms through the period after 1956? However I referred some questions of the general political history, which were important to understand the topics above, but only at a necessary level.

The next chapter referred to the reorganisation and rearming of the HPA. The first subsection is about the controlling system of the army such as the political and party organisations, but the detailed examination of the relationship between the HPA and the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP) was not my intention, because it was beyond my time and the physical limit of the thesis. The main goal here was to represent the army as part of the state system, to see a picture of the army as the contemporary politicians saw it, the HPA's role in the Soviet-Hungarian relationship and to underline the Soviet supremacy in the WP. In the next subsection I introduced the most important technical, theoretical, strategical changes, which were taken place between the end of World War II, and the beginning of the 1960s. After that I referred to the effect which this changes made to especially in the HPA. The problem of the soviet forces stationed in Hungary seemed too important to refer to, because they were mentioned many times in the thesis. So I summarised here the most important facts, and details about them.

Studying the questions of organisation, and weaponry the main question was if the Hungarian armed forces were well equipped or not in that period?

I introduced the organisation of the army a little more detailed, because I think it is important to use correctly some of the military categories, such as company, regiment, division, army corps, gun, battery and so on. Above this I think it is important to have a detailed and colorful picture of the army, which contains the locations of the divisions, and brigades. The question of the military industry is interesting because it makes a connection between military-, and economic history. And also, writing about military industry seemed to be logical, because it produced the goods with (weapons and other staff) which the units I wrote above, were equipped.

The chapter about the military education consist of two parts. These are the history of two military education institute, the United Officer's School, and the Zrínyi Miklós Military Academy, which produced most of the hungarian military education in basic, intermediate and high level, at the time. In this field there are some remarkable work at our service, but I thought I can't skip this problem, because the officer corps is vital for an army's effectiveness in war and also in peace. All in all I can say that an army could not be better than its officer corps. So the question is what kind of officer corps had the HPA? Where was the limit which it was not able surpass? I did not cover the problem of the more or less marginal aspects of the military education such as education of Hungarian military personels in the USSR, education of reservist officers and so on, because this were beyond my time and the phisical limits of the thesis. The later required studying the Russian sources, which are impossible today. The problem of the reservist officers is connected to the problem of the conscript soldiers of the HPA. I did not examine this topic, because it was to outstretching, and I think, as I put it above, that the the essence of an army, especially a conscript army rests on the officer corps. This also explain the lack of the introduction of the NCO's education system. I also have to remember here that the role of the NCO's in the HPA or any other eastern army was very limited.

The strategic conceptions, military planning during the Cold War period, and the HPA's role in that is on one hand very interesting to me, and on the other hand they were not very well known until recently. It fitted to this thesis because I introduced the organisation and weaponry of the HPA, with the elements of the commanding system, after that the the problems of the military education, which produced the backbone of the army; the officer corps, and this final chapter to show us what would be the mission

of this army, in the case of a III. World War. Theoretically the role of an army is always to be as effective as possible in any possible conflict. The effectiveness of the army may be judged, on the basis of the efforts society invested into it, were wasted or not. The question is that the efforts that the Hungarian society invested into the HPA were wasted or not?

### **III. Results of the thesis**

In the following I am going to summarize schematically the most important conclusions I have drawn from this thesis.

The brief presentation of the previous events reveals how difficult was the legacy of 1956 that the army had to bear. The creation of a mass military quickly overburdened the Hungarian economy. Because of the swift and unorganized development and the one-sided Soviet orientation purchased and later here manufactured weapons were partly outdated, partly because of the disparity between the local capacity and the foreign supply, Hungary was unable to create the structure of a modern military. In this Moscow played a big part, their own martial objection was to create an army that functioned as an auxiliary unit, where loyalty to the Soviet Union was the most important (the Soviet advisors were to grant this) and its primary objective was to distract the enemy, until the Soviet forces arrived, doing it all with weaponry and organization on the level of an army from World War II. Great example for this simplified mentality was the creating of a static defence system at the southern border. Politically trustworthy (or so it was believed) but undereducated young workers and peasants were integrated into the officers branch en masse to make this conception reality. However, 1956 proved the unviability of this kind of military development.

During the reorganization as the Hungarian state party as the Soviet military leadership preserved its control over the HPA. New developments were made, but they took into consideration the state of the economy too. The political leadership took precedence over the military leadership, there was no military lobby to speak of. The Warsaw Pact, in theory granted the possibility of catching up military wise for the HPA and ensured the aid of the Soviet forces in a possible war, but in reality it served as tool for the power plays of the Soviet Union.

The reorganization of the military followed Soviet formula: large portion of the units are concentrated west of the Danube. There was no balance of defence, instead there was a concentration of offensive divisions located westward.

The examination of the weaponry show that the HPA got modern weapons relatively swiftly and in great quantity from 1960/61 onwards, however these new weapons were distributed unequally, the western forces got the most of it, meanwhile the eastern units had the more outdated models. By and large it can be said the HPA compared to its contemporaries was relatively well equipped, although there were a few areas (for example armored personal carrier, fighter bombers, helicopters) where it was insufficient.

Regarding the officer training we can see that a long-lasting institution came to be, which was however not without its problems. Recurring themes were the need for applicants with higher education, raising the standards of the instructors, the politically trustworthy but in capability lacking students or the removal of instructors or even leaders. The superior organisations gradually realized the importance of academic/pedagogical knowledge beside the formalities. However objective hardships like financial scantiness, housing, organization of drills were frequent. In light of these facts we can conclude, that although there were many great teachers, instructors and students, despite their best efforts the Hungarian officer training as a whole was mediocre at best.

With the research of military concepts, including the role of the HPA we can examine the strategic state of Europe in the 60's. It had become clear that the HPA, after the revolution gradually became more well equipped and its leadership more prepared. Although it became clear that in case of an actual war Hungary's civilian and combat losses would have been severe, of it would have been the same with a different political orientation. The other important results of the military development in the 60's show, that even with good local and international facilities the equipping of an army is not solvable if we must take into consideration the civilian population and the local economy. So, to the question, are the HPA's abilities proportionate to the task at hand, my answer should be no.

#### **IV. Other works of the author in this topic**

*Hadászati védelmi és támadó elképzelések a Magyar Néphadseregben az 1950-es évek elején.* In: Első Század, (2012) 1. 161–172.

*A Magyar Néphadsereg újjászervezésének és felfegyverzésének néhány problémája az 1956-1965. években.* In: Első Század, (2012) 4. 71-92.

*A Magyar Néphadsereg fegyverzettel való ellátásának néhány problémája az 1950-es évek elején.* In: Első Század, (2012) 4. 61-69.