

## Hungarians in the Spanish Legion?

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The creation of the Spanish Legion (Tercio de Extranjeros)<sup>1</sup> was already decided in 1919 by the Spanish military leadership, but it was ordered only on 28 January 1920 by a royal decree of the ruling king, Alfonso XII of Spain.<sup>2</sup> The plan was that the unsuccessfully performing, poorly trained, great loss-suffering, mainly conscripted corps fighting in the African front should be replaced by "official", well-trained soldiers.<sup>3</sup> They hoped that the military unit created in French style will be at least as successful as its model, the French Foreign Legion. The Legion came under the command of the contemporary Minister of War, José Villalba Riquelme, and lieutenant colonel José Millán-Astray Terrenos was appointed as its first commander, who started right in that year of the creation of the first battalion (bandera) in Ceuta. Although some of the Spanish Chief of the Defense High Command and the officers serving in the motherland was against the establishment of the Legion, the new commander was not disturbed by this, and aware of the solid royal support he created 4 further battalions,<sup>4</sup> which they filled up mainly with Spaniards originating from the earlier Latin-American Spanish colonies (for example Cuba), and in a smaller amount with foreign citizens as well.<sup>5</sup> The battalions are composed of a command company, two infantry company and a machine-gun company. The Legion's first bases was formed in Ceuta, because the primary fields of the organization's application were the Spanish African territories, and its first mission was in Spanish North-Africa, in the Rif War (1920-1926). Namely in

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- 1 The Tercio was the war formation of the Spanish infantry from the second third of the 16th century to the middle of the 17th century. The meaning of the word "third" comes from the meaning that it represented the third of the all-time Spanish infantry. The Tercio's significance lies in that it was the first military organization that merged fiber arms and artillery in one corps in the infantry. The tercio – as a separate tactical unit – represented roughly the power of one regiment (3000 men). It was divided into 10 companies, from which 8 consisted of 200 pikemen, 100 arquebusiers (infantrymen using lighter cannon firearm than a musketeer) and 20 musketeers. This kind of unit secured for almost a century the invincibility of the Spanish infantry. Szabó József, *Hadtudományi lexikon*, Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság, Budapest 1995, s. 1319.
  - 2 The predecessor of the Spanish Legion – which was called by the same name – was established at 28 June 1835 from the soldiers granted by the French government from the French Foreign Legion. The unit's main task was to support Isabella II of Spain in the First Carlist War. The Legion – which lived up to its duty and suffered great losses – was disbanded on 08 December 1938.
  - 3 José E. Alvarez, *The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion During the Rif Rebellion, 1920-1927*, Greenwood Press, Westport CT. 2001, s. 13.
  - 4 Until 1921 the Legion consisted only of 3 battalions, yet because of the Rif War – during which the Legion, that presented almost the only victories was given an opportunity for creating 2 more battalions. Alvarez, *The Betrothed...*, s. 59.
  - 5 The first 200 men accepted in the Legion enlisted persons of mainly Spanish and also early Spanish colonial origins (Latin-America, the Philippines, etc.). The foreigners were represented by a Chinese, 3 Japanese, a Russian prince, a German, an Austrian, an Italian, 2 French, 4 Portuguese, a Maltese, a Belgian and an African American from New York. Alvarez, *The Betrothed...*, s. 19.

the contemporary Spanish Morocco – with the lead of Abd el-Krim – the Rif-tribes revolted against the Spanish colonizers, and they proclaimed their own state, what the Spanish couldn't tolerate, and they dispatched their corps against the Berbers. A cruel war broke out between the facing parties.

For their valor in combat, the unit gained the name Moroccan Tercio (Tercio de Marruecos), nevertheless after the Rif War they were only referred to as the Tercio. At that time they were one of the best trained, equipped, supplied and most renowned corps of the Spanish Army.<sup>6</sup> The world got to know at this time the name of the later Spanish president, Franco Bahamonda, who himself took part in the creation of the Legion, and as the commander of the first battalion he participated in the 1923-27 war's almost every single battle, and he had personally a hand in the defeat of Abd el-Krim.<sup>7</sup> The legionnaires acquired their well-known name from the Spanish Civil War (1937); since then everybody calls them the Spanish Legion or Spanish Foreign Legion. At this time the organization already consisted of 18 battalions, and further 3 – armored, sapper and special operative – units. One of the most renowned leaders of the Legion was the later dictator Francisco Franco, who was the commander of the first battalion, and he later became the second-in-command of the corps himself. His unit – with the help of the Spanish-friendly Moroccan tribesmen's units (Fuerzas Regulares Indígenas) – has fought through the Rif War, where they achieved outstanding reputation as soldiers who are loyal to the end to their officers, and they follow through their orders in any circumstances. This is the reason why their units were sent to oppress the Asturian Miners' Strike of 1934 (October) instead of the regular, miner-sympathizer Spanish Army.<sup>8</sup>

The Legion with the leadership of lieutenant colonel Juan Yagüe played a large part in the Spanish Civil War, where they fought on the side of the anti-republican general, Francisco Franco with the Moroccan units. Thus, logically the most trained, real wartime-experienced troops of the Spanish Army were on the putschists' side, who achieved significant results against the regular, conscripted soldiers. With their help, the revolutionaries could gain foothold at first on the African continent, then on the motherland as well, in fact they conquered more and more areas from the republican forces. During the Civil War the unit suffered serious losses in comparison to its number. Just from the legionnaires 7671 people died, 776 disappeared and 29000 was injured. This is an even bigger loss, even more so regarding that the Legion has never retained bigger corps than 10800 soldiers. In the Civil War that lasted almost 3 years the infantry changed completely 4 times. For example, the 4th battalion of the 13th division, with its 600 fighting soldiers suffered altogether 10000 losses, which meant that it had to be reorganized 17 times. The legionnaires added up to the 12.5% of the "national" side's complete casualties.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, after Franco's victory the Legion's number was significantly reduced and the remaining units were sent back to their barracks in Africa. The Legion consisted of 4 tercios (regiments), and their organization

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6 Alvarez, *The Betrothed...*, s. 166.

7 Thomas P. Anderson, *The French Intelligentsia and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, Dissertations, Loyola University Chicago 1965, s. 12.

8 Alvarez, *The Betrothed...*, s. 223.

9 “Magyar Katonai Szemle”, 1940, 10/ 2, nr 5, s. 561-562.

remained more or less the same as it is today.

In the Second World War, lots of units of the Legion fought in the corps of the "Blue Division", which was lent to the Germans, where it could gain more military experience. After the Second World War came the hard lesson. Although the Spanish were exempt from the prosecution for their neutrality, the Francoist regime was quarantined, and it started to lose its African colonies one by one. First it lost Spanish Morocco in 1956, so the troops gathered there went to Ifni, Ceuta and Mellila, as well as to Spanish Sahara. In the next years the soldiers of the unit took part in every local battle until the withdrawal of the Spanish in 1976. There has been conscription into the infantry of the corps from the Sahrawi tribes, but their proportion reached only a few percent. The training and the equipment of the units was very good, and in its battle order there have been French AMX-30 or AML-90 type middle category tanks and units deployed with Heinkel 111 warplanes besides by the camel fighters. The third tercio of the Legion was stationed in El-Aaiun, while the fourth tercio was in Villa Crisneros.<sup>10</sup>

In "The Forgotten War" (1957-58) the Moroccans attacked Ifni, where the Legion's units defended successfully the enclave with the help of the local auxiliary forces, which regardless was given to the Moroccans. Thereafter, the units of the Legion were reassigned to Spanish Sahara, where they were reorganized, while their units were supplemented.

However, they were not able to rest here, because the Sahrawis also wanted an independent state and in 1967 they created their own political movement, the Saharan Liberation Organization (Harakat Tahrir sagaia el-Hamra wa Oued ed-Dahab),<sup>11</sup> which first leader was Mohamed Sidi Ibrahim Bassiri. Although the organization wanted to reach independence by peaceful means, soon a bloody battle took place between them and the Legion's corps. Shortly after – in 10 May 1973 – the Sahrawis formed the Polisario (Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia El-Hamra y Rio de Oro) with the aim of the total liberation of Western Sahara.<sup>12</sup> The new movement carried out its first action 10 days later, on 20 May, when its members attacked the Spanish military checkpoint in El-Khanga.<sup>13</sup> In a little while they executed other attacks against smaller military installations like Mahbas, Echderia, Bir Lehmar, Tifariti, Hauza, Amgala or Guelta Zemmour, and they also assaulted the phosphate mines in Bou Craa, where they damaged the phosphate-carrying facilities linking these barracks to the port. At that time, the Spanish thought of Western Sahara as their own, and they mobilized the units of the military to settle the matter with the new armed group. In May 1974 they began the "Barrido"-operation – Operacion Barrido –, during which they deployed military helicopters besides the Policia Territorial and the Tropas Nomadas against the Polisario's militants. Whilst the organization suffered heavy losses, it couldn't be

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10 Besenyő János, *A nyugat-szaharai válság egy magyar békefenntartó szemével*, IDRResearch Kft./Publikon Kiadó, Pécs 2012, s. 64.

11 S.C. Saxena, *Western Sahara, No alternative to armed struggle*, Kalinga Publications, Delhi, 1995, s. 113-114. and Stephen Zunes – Jacob Mundy, *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism and Conflict Irresolution*, Syracuse, N.Y, Syracuse University Press 2010, s. 103.

12 Their founders named the organization at first FRELISARIO, but they changed their name soon to Polisario.

13 David Lynn Price, *Morocco and the Sahara: Conflict and Development*, "Conflict Studies", The Institute for the Study of the Conflict, 1977, nr 88, s. 5-6.

eliminated, in fact, more and more Sahrawis joined them, among whom a lot served in the Legion or in the military, as well as the police organizations set up from locals. Yet not only the Sahrawis, but also Morocco and Mauritania laid claim to the area of Spanish Sahara, which the Spanish – who were unable to hold onto the colony – gave to the two neighboring countries, what resulted in a war until 1990 (that actually hasn't ended until now) between the natives, Mauritania<sup>14</sup> and Morocco. Finally, the units of the Legion withdrew their entire force from Western Sahara in 1976, and they dislocated the larger part of the troops to the Canary Islands. By this the organization's activity has largely finished, though smaller units remained in Ceuta as well as Mellila. In 1987 it was reshaped, thus foreigners (except for the Spanish) were not allowed to serve in it anymore. In 2001 – after disbanding the regular army – the foreigners could sign up again.<sup>15</sup>

### **Hungarian volunteers in the Legion**

Although most of the Hungarians signing up to foreign military duty joined the French Foreign Legion, quite a few tried their luck in the Spanish Legion as well, whilst a lot less data is available about them compared to the ones serving in the French Legion.

Among the first legionnaires was Lajos Matuss, who couldn't find any work in his closer environment, so he tried his luck abroad. Since it wasn't easier to get employment there, he went to the Spanish Legion's recruitment office. Matuss got into the Legion because of bread-and-butter worries and he served in the fortress of Ceuta and took part in the battles against the Rif military leader, Abd el-Krim.<sup>16</sup>

At that time also Lajos Imerle from Esztergom served in the Legion, who got into the hell of the First World War from the desks of the Training-college. First, he served as an ensign, then as a first lieutenant, when he was taken prisoner by the Russians and was deported to Siberia, from where he got home with great difficulty. At home he didn't find his place and soon he volunteered to the Legion, where he began his service as a regular soldier, then merely in three years he received the highest non-commissioned officer rank (sub-lieutenant). Along his service he acquired several acknowledgements and decorations, then after his contract expired he joined another corps and he served in the Spanish gendarmerie in Tétouan.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Mauritania was defeated by the natives and in 1978, it made peace relinquishing all of her territorial claims. Tony Hodges, *Western Sahara, The Roots of a Desert War*, Lawrence and Hill Company, Westport CT. 1983, s. 267-276.

15 Henk Driessen –Willy Jansen, *Staging Hyper-masculinity on Maundy Thursday: Christ of the Good Death, the Legion and Changing Gender Practices in Spain*, “Exchange”, 2013, nr 42., s. 86-106. 89.

16 Hungarians fought not only in the Spanish Legion but also in the army of Abd el-Krim as deserters, thus the Hungarians could even face each other on the battlefield. Dirk Sasse, *Franzosen, Briten und Deutsche im Rifkrieg 1921-1926, Spekulanten und Sympathisanten, Deserteure und Hasardeure im Dienste Abdelkrims*, R. Oldenburg Verlag, München 2006, s. 90., 104., 110. The former Hungarian first lieutenant, Sándor Sáski fled to the Arabic rebels: Géza Paksy, frigate-lieutenant can't commission his West-African flying company because off the Rifqabil-wars. “Kis Újság”, 30 May 1934, s. 7., “Kis Újság”, Tuesday, 29 September 1925, s. 5.

17 *Imerle Lajos magyar tanító spanyol csendőr Afrikában*, “Pesti Napló”, 16 September 1928, Sunday Issue, s. 35.

One of the TV-broadcasts of the Hungarian Telegraphic Office (MTI, 30 July 1931) prepared an account on another legionnaire, Jenő Jakus.<sup>18</sup> Namely Jakus carried on a communist propaganda-campaign, in the villages near Szeged, so he came to the attention of the police. According to the document for his role in the 1919 communist events, he was sentenced to 10 years of prison time, which he carried out in the Hungarian Prison in Szeged (the so-called "Csillagbörtön"), but he successfully escaped, then emigrated from the country. Firstly, he served in the French Foreign Legion, then from there he relocated to the Spanish Legion, from where he was "discharged". After that he stayed in France, then returned to Hungary, where he came again to the attention of the police, because he applauded the Hungarian Soviet Republic, as he abused verbally the ruling government. The policemen caught him, but he escaped from custody and he was captured only a few days later, then he was imprisoned again.

In 1926, József Bakay Smolka entered the Legion, who first served in Mellila. He was first promoted to the rank of lance-corporal, then in 1930 he became sergeant. In the Civil War similarly to most of the legionnaires he fought on the side of Franco. On the 11th August 1936 Extremaduran Operation his battalion achieved outstanding results, in which he had personally a huge role. In November 1936, at the Siege of Alcazár, then not much later at Madrid he was slightly injured. In recognizing his merits, he received the decoration of the war medal. A few days later he was again injured, and during his hospitalization he was promoted to the rank of ensign. In 1937, he was ordered to the headquarters of the 2nd Legion as an acknowledgement for his endurance at the fronts of Andalusia and Extremadura. In 1946, he was still in the Legion, when in recognition for his continuous duty for 15 years Franco rewarded him with 1500 pesetas.<sup>19</sup>

Again, at the time of the Civil War several Hungarians served in the Legion. One of them was Tibor Liszbon, about whom we know only that he was promoted to the rank of sergeant on April 1937 and he lost his life during the War. József Borsica Isermann had a lot more adventurous life. Barely at the age of 22 he joined the Spanish Navy, from where he resigned in 1928 after 4 years of service. However, civil life was not for him, so in 1931 he entered the Legion. At the 28th September 1936 Peraleda de la Mata battle he stood well ground, henceforth they promoted him to the rank of lance-corporal, then on August 1938 he became the sergeant of the IV.th Battalion. At the time of the Civil War Pál Seszták from Nyíregyháza served in the Legion as well, who was unable to find job as a tailor at his home, so he emigrated to Spain. Since he couldn't find a solid workplace, in 1934 he tried his fortune in the Legion, where he attained the rank of sergeant, then in the Spanish Civil War he fought on the side of

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18 "Magyar Távirati Iroda", 15th broadcast, 30 July 1931, 13 hour 35 minute, <[https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/KulfBelfHirek\\_1945\\_11\\_1\\_001-123/?pg=411&layout=s&query=idegenl%C3%A9gi%C3%B3](https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/KulfBelfHirek_1945_11_1_001-123/?pg=411&layout=s&query=idegenl%C3%A9gi%C3%B3)> (05.08.2017). From the same case also relates:" Friss Újság", 31 July 1931, s. 8., the "Budapesti Hírlap", 31 July 1931, s. 4., as well as the "Népszava", 31 July 1931, s. 12.

19 "Diario Oficial, del Ministerio del Ejercito", Año LVII. Num. 34, Sábado, 9 de febrero, de 1946, Tomo I.Pág. 529, <[http://www.bibliotecavirtualdefensa.es/BVMDefensa/i18n/catalogo\\_imagenes/imagen.cmd?path=26500&posicion=1](http://www.bibliotecavirtualdefensa.es/BVMDefensa/i18n/catalogo_imagenes/imagen.cmd?path=26500&posicion=1)> (05.08.2017)

Franco against the Republicans. In his unit he served with another Hungarian, János Szmolár from Békéscsaba, who also received non-commissioned officer status.<sup>20</sup> Gyula Gunda flight first lieutenant who – after graduating from the Ludovika Military Academy – was the officer of the Royal Hungarian Army; he did his military duty first at the Sopron Garrison, as well as at the Szombathely Aviation Branch, then at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War he asked for his dischargement, and he served on the side of Franco against the Republican forces. In the battles he won a lot of air victories, although he was injured a few times. For example, in the air battle above Madrid he had to execute a forced landing during which he broke his arm; again in 1938, near the heavy fighting at Tereuel his warplane was shot, and he only survived the crash with serious injuries.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, between the two World Wars a lot of articles were published not just about the French Foreign Legion, but also about the Spanish Legion, and because of that a lot of people regarded the Legion as an opportunity – or a last opportunity. For example, three students tried to escape from Budapest to the Legion. Nevertheless, their tour ended at Székesfehérvár, from where the local police took them home.<sup>22</sup>

After the Second World War, a lot of Hungarians fled to Spain,<sup>23</sup> where the Spanish Foreign Legion welcomed them in companion with allied Germans soldiers. Most of them tried to change their names, so we don't know nothing about the largest part of them, though there were those, who served in the Legion under their own names. To them belonged the Debrecen-born Ádám Horváth, who was in the corps of the Legion for more than a year. According to his account published in the *Új Dunántúl* periodical in 1946, the Arrow Cross officers have recruited Hungarians to the Spanish Legion at München. It mentions by name one of the members of the recruiting "Legionist Commission", Arrow Cross captain László Fehérváry. The volunteer-legionary Horváth was transported with his 30 companions through Spain to France, then to Morocco. According to the accounts in the Moroccan camp he had already met with several Hungarians, and he was put in a separate Hungarian unit, which was led by Alfred Erichson German staff-officer. A few among the Hungarians went to fight in Greece against the communists. Horváth met with men from Budapest, Transylvania and the Great Hungarian Plain, and according to his account recently some other men arrived coming from the English camp near Klagenfurt. Malaria broke out amongst them, but their number didn't decrease, since reserves flew in week after week. There was also a Hungarian language newspaper printed at the training facility, which reported on the Hungarian situation. Regarding the article from around 1947, the

20 "Nyírvidék – Szabolcsi Hírlap", 04 August 1936, s. 3, [https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/Nyirvidek\\_1936\\_08/?pg=18&layout=s&query=Spanyol%20Idegenl%C3%A9gi%C3%B3](https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/Nyirvidek_1936_08/?pg=18&layout=s&query=Spanyol%20Idegenl%C3%A9gi%C3%B3) (06.08.2017)

21 *Magyar repülőtiszt hősi halála a spanyol fronton*, "Kis Újság", 09 February 1938, Wednesday Issue, s. 5., as well as: *Magyar pilótatisztet lőttek le a spanyol vörösök*, "Makói Újság", 10 February 1938, 3.

22 "Budapesti Hírlap", 21 Februray 1939, Tuesday Issue, s. 8.

23 Anderle Ádám, *A magyar-spanyol kapcsolatok ezer éve*, w: Iberoamericana Quinqueeclesiensis 3, Pécsi Tudományegyetem Ibero-Amerika Központ, Pécs 2005, s. 21., <http://www.idi.btk.pte.hu/dokumentumok/ibero2005.pdf> (12.08.2017)

Emigrated Hungarians Republican League took over the recruitment into the Legion.<sup>24</sup>

Attila Darvas Tóth joined the organization in 1964, who served in Spanish Sahara.<sup>25</sup> The Hungarian legionnaire arrived from Veszprém in 1975, and as he entered the Legion, he found himself in the Western Saharan areas, where he was involved in a fight not only with the militants of the Polisario but with the Moroccan soldiers infiltrating the area as well. Considering his narrative, between 1958 and 1986 more foreigners served in the Legion, which was partly because the French Foreign Legion rejected the previously convicted or wanted persons, so they went to the Spanish, who welcomed every volunteer to their desert wars (Ifni, Western Sahara) with considerable casualties. However, after the death of Franco (1975) the number of foreigners has started to decline, then in 1986 – after the Spanish Ministry of Defense reduced the effective force and reshaped the organization – almost every one of them disappeared.

The Hungarian legionnaire signed up at the most chaotic time of the Legion, when the legionnaires fought lesser and greater battles every day with the guerillas of the Polisario. The platoon – where he was dispatched as a recruit – didn't have a non-commissioned officer in command, since their sergeant lost his life in a battle at the Mauritanian borderline in December 1974 and the Legion couldn't handle his replacement in several months. During his duty he met with a legionnaire from Kecskemét who worked on a sea-boat, and from there he deserted to Canada with a Hungarian non-commissioned officer from Pest. He knew about another legionnaire, who was a physician, and after serving his time he went to Rhodesia. Besides, this he has heard about other Hungarian legionnaires, but he hasn't met them. According to him the Spanish gave the lower ranks of non-commissioned officers readily to the Eastern Europeans, but they couldn't receive the officer rank.

After his training he got to Ceuta, where he was continuously on guard duty, and from where they took him every three months for four weeks on road patrol to the Western Saharan desert. By that time, he had learned that the Spanish don't like or respect the Legion, but they regard it as a useful tool for tasks where great losses could be expected. He thought that the most difficult time was those seven months after Franco died (20 November 1975), and the Spanish decided that they give Western-Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania. Although the Spanish population and the members of the public administration left the area by the end of 1975, the soldiers of the Legion stayed another two months. They didn't have any station or dispatched patrol which wasn't attacked, a lot of times by those Sahrawis who served previously in the nomad units (Tropas Nomadas) created by the Spanish, and they changed sides to the Polisario. The Hungarian legionnaire lived to see that the Legion leaving the Sahara became unnecessary for the Spanish government, that how the previously armed unit lost morale, how did its members commit criminal offenses, after that how were the soldiers of the Legion forced to leave the organization. He himself was discharged in 1984.<sup>26</sup> It seems appropriate that Hungarians served in the Legion even after him, who could have

24 “Új Dunántúl”, 238, nr IV, 10 October 1947, Sunday Issue, s. 2.

25 “AGMAV”, C.46789., Cp. 30.

26 *Volt egyszer egy...*, “Nagypolitika.hu” <<https://nagypolitika.hu/2016/02/22/volt-egyszer-egy-spanyol-idegenlegio-i/>> (06.08.2017), as well as: *Volt egyszer egy Spanyol Idegenlégió II*, “Nagypolitika.hu”, <<https://nagypolitika.hu/2016/08/11/volt-egyszer-egy-spanyol-idegenlegio-ii/>> (06.08.2017)

left the corps possibly after the removal of the foreigners – for example Attila Szászvári, who signed up in 1977.

The legionnaires introduced up to this point entered the Legion voluntarily. Moreover, there was a course going on for years within which Spain and the Fraternal Community of Hungarian Fighters composed of migrant soldiers, gendarmes (former Horthyst officers) sent in the outmost secrecy for a one year "group training" to the Spanish Legion, so they could refresh their faded military knowledge, and they could learn new fighting techniques. Before this paper would argue the details of the program, I would like to introduce the Fraternal Community of Hungarian Fighters.

### **Fraternal Community of Hungarian Fighters**

The Soldiers' Fraternal Community built up as a military organization and consisting mainly of soldiers was founded in the Summer of 1948 by major-general Ferenc Adonyi-Naredy in Klagenfurt, and it was later renamed to Fraternal Community of Hungarian Fighters (MHBK). However, the official founding of the MHBK took place only at 01 January 1949.<sup>27</sup> The organization was seated until 1955 in Austria, in the town of Absam, then it moved to Munich. The first leader of the organization was major-general András Zákó, who filled in his rank until his 1968 death. The largest groups of the organization operated in Austria and Germany, but soon in all of the Western European countries, in fact, after the beginning of their emigration they formed units in North and South America too. Thus, at the beginning of the 1950's the MHBK was present in 23 countries with 31 groups consisting of tens of thousands members.<sup>28</sup> The organization consisted of divisions and subdivisions. Its membership consisted mostly of Horthy's officers or non-commissioned officers emigrating after the Second World War; only some of them came from other law enforcement organizations (gendarmerie, police, etc.), and civilians didn't join at all. For this, the MHBK considered itself an exclusively military organization.<sup>29</sup> The Americans thought they were useful against the Soviet and the Hungarian Secret Service, and according to some intelligence reports, several officers belonged to their membership, who were formerly active members of the Arrow Cross Party, so the Americans tried continuously to control the organization.<sup>30</sup>

The organization helped officially the soldiers living in emigration, however – mostly in the first years – they continued intelligence activity against the communist Hungarian government. They cashed in the gathered information for the American,

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27 Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció...*, s. 26-27.

28 Baráth Magdolna, *Támogatni vagy bomlasztani? Adalékok a magyar hivatalos szervek emigrációs politikájának változásához*, "Betekintő", 2011, nr 3  
<[http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2011\\_3\\_barath.pdf](http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2011_3_barath.pdf)> (20.08.2017)

29 Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció...*, s. 26.

30 Collegial Society of Hungarian veterans, aka. Comradship of the Hungarian warriors, 11/3/50, CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/MAGYAR,%20HARCOSOK,%20BAJTARSI,%20KOZOSSEGE%20%20VOL.%201\\_0003.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/MAGYAR,%20HARCOSOK,%20BAJTARSI,%20KOZOSSEGE%20%20VOL.%201_0003.pdf)> (20.08.2017.), as well as: BRIEF about the Comradship of Hungarian Veterans, DCE 1858, 17 April 1951, CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/MAGYAR%2C%20HARCOSOK%2C%20BAJTARSI%2C%20KOZOSSEGE%20%20VOL.%201\\_0014.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/MAGYAR%2C%20HARCOSOK%2C%20BAJTARSI%2C%20KOZOSSEGE%20%20VOL.%201_0014.pdf)> (20.08.2017)



French and other Western European governments. However, a lot of members of the organization worked on their own, and they sold their information to other secret services. After a time, they sold irrelevant gossips, for example those collected from refugees, or data created by themselves – several times false facts as well – to the Western intelligence agencies. For this they handled the data collected by the MHBK with suspicion, and because of their insufficiency (or just falsity) they looked for other sources of information. Because of the aforesaid the CIA had already regarded the MHBK an unreliable organization in 1951,<sup>31</sup> in fact after it proved the previously mentioned from several sources, they shared this information with other intelligence agencies.<sup>32</sup> The MHBK's members in Hungarian illegality gathered a lot of information too, who had been united by the *Kopjás* (literally "pikemen") movement modelled on the Nazi Werwolf in the time of the Arrow Cross Party. The creation of the pikemen was in 1942, but it was only realized in 1944 by general András Zákó and Miklós Korponay captain-general. The duty of the movement was mainly to commit sabotage actions against the Soviet corps arriving in the country and they had to slow the Russian advance. The movement continued its activities after the war, and in 1949 it submerged completely into the Fraternal Community of Hungarian Fighters. Zákó declared to the Westerners that the *Kopjás*-movement is an effectively functioning resistance organization. But the facts proved otherwise. The ÁVH caught 558 pikemen, but they sentenced 286 persons, which questions the real efficiency of the organization. Nevertheless, it was capable at least to retain the agents of the Hungarian and Soviet intelligence, thus the Americans and their affiliate organizations could operate more effectively.<sup>33</sup> The MHBK created with its activities such problems towards the military officers of the former political system, that the leaders of the Party removed most of them from the army,<sup>34</sup> thus it weakened a lot, since the field officers and officers could be replaced on the one hand politically reliable, but on the other hand militarily untrained comrades. The organization published monthly its own newspaper titled "*Hadak Útján*" (literally *On the Path of the Wars*),<sup>35</sup> and several publications, which relates the fate of the Hungarian soldiers in Soviet captivity (White Book),<sup>36</sup> or the

31 WASH 01854, 28 July 1951, CIA <<https://archive.org/details/ZAKOANDREAS-0020>> (20.08.2017), as well as: WASH 01864, 29 July 1951, CIA,

<<https://archive.org/details/ZAKOANDREAS-0021>> (20.08.2017)

32 In greater details about this: Central Intelligence Agency: Paper Mills and Fabrication, February 1952.

<<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/PAPER%20MILLS%20AND%20FABRICATION0001.pdf>> (20.08.2017)

33 Ungváry Krisztián, *Az MHBK szürke eminenciása: Zákó András és az ellene folytatott állambiztonsági eljárások*, w: Gebei Sándor, ifj. Bertényi Iván, Rainer M. János, „...nem leleplezni, hanem megismerni és megérteni”. *Tanulmányok a 60 éves Romsics Ignác tiszteletére*, EKF Líceum Kiadó, Eger 2011., s. 483 – 498., <[http://tortenelem.uni-eger.hu/public/uploads/romsics60\\_5542287542c20.pdf](http://tortenelem.uni-eger.hu/public/uploads/romsics60_5542287542c20.pdf)> (20.08.2017), Zsitnyányi Ildikó, *Egy „titkos háború” természete - A Magyar Harcosok Bajtársi Közössége tagjaival szemben lefolytatott internálási és büntetőeljárásai gyakorlat 1948 – 1950.*, “Hadtörténelmi Közlemények”, 2002, 115, nr 4, <<http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00018/00022/pdf/hk4.pdf>> (20.08.2017),

34 Pihurik Judit, *A „horthysta katonatiszt” mint potenciális kém a Rákosi-korszakban*, “Betekintő”, 2004, nr 3, <[http://www.betekinto.hu/en/2014\\_4\\_pihurik](http://www.betekinto.hu/en/2014_4_pihurik)> (20.08.2017)

35 Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció...*, s. 28., 38., 113.

36 The whole book can be reached at the library of the CIA at the next link:

Hungarian deportations (Black Book), as well as it published other uncomfortable themes for the Hungarian communist government.<sup>37</sup>

After the events of 1956, the organization marginalized more and more. At the time it had already lost the support of the American and French secret service, and later – because of the softening of the Cold War, the different internal conflicts and the death of András Zákó –, losing its military nature it started to "civilize", it ended its intelligence activities and it became only one of the several emigrational organizations.<sup>38</sup>

### The MHBK and the Spanish Legion

One of the publicly declared goals of the MHBK was that in the frame of the Third World War they could expel the communist regime which forced them into emigration, and "reconquer" the country. However, the Western allies – although they encouraged the emigrants and they made them draw different plans<sup>39</sup> – had their reasons why they didn't want to arm those previously fighting against them. Instead the leaders of Spain – which became isolated after the Second World War – were seriously occupied with the thought of a war against the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. They thought that from the Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Croatian and other nationality refugees with the cooperation of the Spanish Legion they would create international brigades, which would take part in the fight against the communists and the liberation of their countries.

The MHBK had – at the time of their founding – already made good connections with the Spanish authorities thanks to former colonel-general Jenő Szántay, who was the leader of the MHBK's Spanish organization from 1950.<sup>40</sup> According to certain information, major-general Zákó had held negotiations already in that year with the Spanish military and secret service leaders, so that Hungarian military officials could receive additional training, possibly permanent employment in the units of the Spanish Army.<sup>41</sup> According to one of the reports of the CIA, some of the Hungarian military

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<[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/MAGYAR%2C%20HARCOSOK%2C%20BAJTAR%2C%20KOZOSSEGE%20%20VOL.%201\\_0014.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/MAGYAR%2C%20HARCOSOK%2C%20BAJTAR%2C%20KOZOSSEGE%20%20VOL.%201_0014.pdf)> (20.08.2017)

37 Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció...*, s. 110-113.

38 Ungváry, *Az MHBK szürke eminenciása...*, s. 483 – 498., <[http://tortenelem.uni-eger.hu/public/uploads/romsics60\\_5542287542c20.pdf](http://tortenelem.uni-eger.hu/public/uploads/romsics60_5542287542c20.pdf)> (20.08.2017), Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció...*, s. 264.

39 One of these plans were elaborated by colonel-general Ferenc Koszorús, who was asked for this by the government of the USA, but the military organization drafted by him was not actualized. <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOSZORUS%2C%20FERENC\\_0015.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOSZORUS%2C%20FERENC_0015.pdf)> (20.08.2017). The USA counted also on the creation of a Hungarian Legion from the refugees, but eventually neither this was realized. Hungarian Legion, 6 February 1951, 21-CSAVA, CIA., <<https://archive.org/details/ZAKOANDREAS-0006>> (20.08.2017)

40 The Hungarian emigration in 1950, June 1, 1950. CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/ZAKO%2C%20ANDREAS\\_0160.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/ZAKO%2C%20ANDREAS_0160.pdf)> (20.08.2017)

41 The fact of the negotiations was strengthened by the CIA too, which had Zákó – as a nazi war-criminal – under surveillance. <<https://archive.org/details/ZAKOANDREAS-0153>> (22.08.2017), as well as: 1 June 1950, CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/ZAKO%2C%20ANDREAS\\_0156.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/ZAKO%2C%20ANDREAS_0156.pdf)> (22.08.2017)

officers could have already joined the Spanish Legion is 1950.<sup>42</sup>

The former officers serving in the army of Horthy could receive a one-year "guest-officer exchange-service" opportunity in the Legion. The assignment of the officers was organized by Szántay, neither one of the officers could maintain relationship with the embassy, so they wouldn't raise the attention of the Hungarian intelligence. The MHBK did neither support that the officers could see each other from different units, this was allowed only to the ones serving in the same unit. Though usually they signed up for a one-year service, there was always opportunity for prolongation. They paid attention in particular to the officers so they could get to the corps appropriate for their qualifications and branch of service, thus they could refresh and get their knowledge up to date. It seems that not only the soldiers living in Spain could serve in the Spanish units, but the members of the military emigration living in other countries as well. The officers received during their duty a payment equal to the Spanish, to which payment in kind (accommodation, food) was also ensured by the Spanish government, but lots of them found it insufficient.

Until 1955, the Spanish had already taken into consideration, that the international corps can be formed, despite this they continued the "guest-officer program", in fact they promised to establish a "symbolic" Hungarian unit. We are aware, that in 1956 artillery-lieutenant Gábor Bethlen in Ceuta, a sapper-lieutenant named Makray and an artillery-lieutenant Bényei or Bénei in Barcelona.<sup>43</sup>

In the wake of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Spanish leadership proposed a military intervention in Hungary under the supervision of the UN, but because of the disagreement of the superpowers and the Suez Crisis it couldn't be realized.<sup>44</sup> Despite this the Spanish continued to uphold the previous friendly relationship with the Hungarian military emigration, and – although in outmost secrecy – they welcomed Hungarian officers further on in the corps of the Legion. At 23 March 1957 the Hungarian ambassador at the time writes about one of the volunteers in the following way:

As a guest of the Spanish Army former Royal flying lieutenant Kálmán Szeödemeteri Dömötör fulfills in his previous Hungarian Royal Military rank in a one-year service of combat officer-duty in the second regiment (Dar-Riffien, Morocco) of the Spanish Legion.<sup>45</sup>

After this, he joined the organization of the MHBK, and in 1957 he spent a year in the Legion, but he was also active politically. For example – after the events of 1956 –, he wrote a letter to Béla Király, who had been living as a refugee in the USA, asking that the revolutionary commission working in America wouldn't publish statements

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42 Operation VENUS, Ref: OBBA-5355, 11 May 1956, CIA.  
<[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20%20VOL.%202\\_0030.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20%20VOL.%202_0030.pdf)> (22.08.2017)

43 Operation VENUS, Ref: OBBA-5355, 11 May 1956, CIA,  
<[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20%20VOL.%202\\_0030.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20%20VOL.%202_0030.pdf)> (22.08.2017)

44 Anderle, *1956 és a spanyol...*, s. 55-62.

45 *Marosi Ferenc levele, 1957. március 23.*, s. 8-195. Anderle, *Marosy-iratok...*, s. 140-141.

condemning the Spanish. Király answered to this letter and asked the lieutenant to prepare for him a report which would account on the situation of the Hungarian refugees arriving in Spain. This report was later sent to him by the lieutenant.<sup>46</sup>

The ÁVH had already received information, that the MHBK conducts trainings in Spain, for that it ordered its agents to gather as much information as possible regarding the issue.<sup>47</sup> They protested several times at the Spanish, that they take part in activities to overthrow the government, as well as that they give weapons training to the Hungarian emigrants, in fact they enlist them in the Spanish Army. Nevertheless, the Spanish officially rejected that they would have recruited emigrant Hungarians or other nationality emigrant military units, or they would plan to merge these into the Spanish Army.<sup>48</sup> It is true that the plan to create various Hungarian corps occurred in 1955, but it was never realized. In the ÁVH's opinion, by that time 5-600 officers and non-commissioned officers had already been trained in Spain.<sup>49</sup> One of the officers of the ÁVH, Gábor Füredi dispatched his subordinate officer to Spain with the cover story that he is sent by his factory, with machinery-improving intentions, and his primary objective was to gather as much information as possible from Marosi and Szántay, about the Spanish training facilities, in which not only Hungarians but also other nationals are trained by the Spanish.<sup>50</sup> The agent didn't get to know anything about these camps, since Marosi was not initiated into the military programs and the one responsible for them – Szántay – was dying. The only information gathered were from Marosi's secretary, Aurél Czilchert – who served in the Legion for one year – which

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- 46 Kálmán Dömötör didn't stay with the Spanish after the expiration of his service, rather he reassigned to the French Foreign Legion. He fought in Vietnam, and after he received French citizenship, he stayed in France where he became the secretary-general of the MHBK, as well as he was the president of the Fraternal Community of the Hungarian Legionnaires until 1990, when he passed away. *Interjú Sujánszky Jenővel, a párizsi magyarok október 23-i „diadalívi” megemlékezéseinek szervezőjével*, <[http://www.nagyimretarsasag.hu/images/kiadvanyok/oroksegunk\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nagyimretarsasag.hu/images/kiadvanyok/oroksegunk_2013.pdf)> (22.08.2017), as well as: Nóvé Béla, *”PATRIA NOSTRA” ‘56-os menekült kamaszok a Francia Idegenlégióban*, Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, Történelemtudományi Doktori Iskola, Eger 2016, s. 98., <[http://disszertacio.unieszterhazy.hu/17/1/N%C3%B3v%C3%A9\\_B%C3%A9la\\_disszert%C3%A1ci%C3%B3.pdf](http://disszertacio.unieszterhazy.hu/17/1/N%C3%B3v%C3%A9_B%C3%A9la_disszert%C3%A1ci%C3%B3.pdf)> (22.08.2017)
- 47 Operation Venus, OBBA-4701, 27 January 1956, CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202\\_0024.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202_0024.pdf)>, as well as: Operation Venus, OBBA 3554, 8 June 1956, CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202\\_0032.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202_0032.pdf)> (22.08.2017)
- 48 Operation Venus, OBBA-3554, 8 June 1956, CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202\\_0032.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202_0032.pdf)> (22.08.2017)
- 49 This statement was treated with suspicion by that agent, with whom his ÁVH supervising officer (Gábor Füredi) shared this. It is possible, that the secret service tried to gather more support from the communist leadership and ensure their position by the enlargement of the information received from them. <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202\\_0001.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202_0001.pdf)> (22.08.2017)
- 50 Operation Venus, OBBA-4701, 27 January 1956, CIA, <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202\\_0024.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20VOL.%202_0024.pdf)> (22.08.2017)

was not enough information for the ÁVH.<sup>51</sup>

In spite of this, the Spanish didn't reject the idea of creating an international army consisting of refugees emigrating from the communist countries, which they would have then used against the Soviets. The plan, which can be found under the title of „*Lo que debe hacerse en este momento*”<sup>52</sup> in the Foreign Policy Archives of Madrid was probably prepared by general Zákó at the request of the Spanish. The plan suggested the establishment of a Central and Eastern European military command, which either with a Polish-Baltic or a Southeastern center would have consisted of 5000-5000 number Hungarian, Slovakian, Czech, Sudeten German, Romanian, Croatian and Bulgarian units. According to the plan they would have started the liberation fight with an outbreak of a Czech revolt. The units would've been formed by Spanish support, but also by American material assistance, and the creator of the plan hoped for the material help of the Americans. The scheme – calculating with three years – believed in the possibility of a restrained nuclear war. It was written with handwriting on the plan that it is supported by the Spanish government, with the condition that the Americans approve of it as well, but only with the leading of Zákó. Yet another secret material suggested the stricter control and selection of the Hungarian refugees arriving in Spain, and the establishment of a secret financial fund – handled by the government – for operations against the communist countries.<sup>53</sup> However, in 1957 the Spanish political and military leadership hasn't regarded these efforts relevant, thus the guest-officer programs were terminated from 1958 on.

### Conclusion

At the end of the article it is worth to summarize the facts about the Hungarians and the Spanish Legion. At the beginning, the research was focusing on the participation of the Hungarians in the Spanish Saharan and Western Saharan conflicts. It can be concluded that the Hungarians have regularly taken part in the events of the North-African Saharan wars, for example the Rif-wars. There have been several Hungarian officers, who fought in those battles. Between the two World Wars and mostly after the Second World War the Hungarians were present in the area, since the Hungarian military and its soldiers were welcomed by the Spanish and in the Spanish Legion, which was one of the main sources of the Francoist military. The Hungarians – entering the Legion – took part also in the Spanish Civil War, where they used their experience to help the revolutionaries. After the Second World War and the formation of the Eastern Bloc, the former Hungarian soldiers became uncomfortable for the new communist regime, and as they were persecuted, a lot of them emigrated or fled the country hoping to find support against the communist regime. Franco himself had an idea – which he elaborated with one of the Hungarian veterans – to establish an army of Central and Eastern European emigrants, but it was never realized, because of the unfavorable

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51 Operation VENUS, Ref: OBBA-5355, 11 May 1956, CIA,  
<[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20%20VOL.%202\\_0030.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/KOZMA%2C%20FERENC%20%20%20VOL.%202_0030.pdf)> (22.08.2017)

52 What we have to do at this moment.

53 Anderle, *1956 és a spanyol...*, s. 60-61.

political situation. However, a lot of Hungarian soldiers received hard training in the Spanish Legion, and they were organized in the MHBK. They have not only fought in North Africa, but also were recruited by Western and Hungarian secret services, which wanted to plant them to gather information about the ongoing activities of the Hungarian emigration. The Hungarian communist secret service (AVH), the English, American, Belgian and French intelligence used them to receive data about the former officers' operational work. The very complicated situation ended in 1958, when – because they didn't believe that liberation could be achieved – the Spanish relinquished the idea of the common army and the Hungarian officers "guest-training" ended.

#### HUNGARIANS IN THE SPANISH LEGION?

##### Summary

The research was conducted on the activities of the Hungarian emigrants in the Spanish Legion. It was presupposed, that the Hungarians provided an important supply for the Spanish Legion and the Spanish army as well in the Spanish Civil War. Examining the facts in can be concluded that the Hungarian soldiers participation in the earlier North-African wars and the Spanish conflicts had an important effect on the areas geopolitical situation, and it is possible to assume that the veterans played a relevant role in the ongoing military and intelligence war between the West and the East.