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Doctoral School of History

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Hungarian Americans and the First World War.
Military Service and Reflections from the Press, with
Special Focus on the State of New York

PhD Thesis Booklet

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Aims and Scope

The primary aim of the research concluded in this dissertation is to conduct an in-depth examination of Hungarian-born soldiers of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in World War One. Immigration from the territory of Austria-Hungary in the United States had been at its peak in the decade before World War One. Approximately 1.5 million Hungarians were living in the US in the years preceding the Great War – some of whom were temporary immigrant labor, but the majority was seeking permanent stay or even citizenship. When the war broke out, thousands of Hungarians indicated their intention to travel home and enlist in the Hungarian army, other tens of thousands stayed in the US but attempted to help by sending money or supplies to the troops fighting in the frontlines. Soon, questions started to rise about where the loyalty of these ‘hyphenated’ immigrants’ lied.

After the US entered the war in April, 1917, immigrants from Austria-Hungary were categorized as ‘enemy aliens’ under the Selective Service Act. However, roughly 3.000 of them ended up serving in the American Military. Although Hungarian communities were not targeted with xenophobic attacks as much as their German counterparts, but they definitely faced atrocities for being ‘enemy aliens’.

The essential part of the thesis aims to reveal the military service of Hungarian-Americans in the US Army of World War One. Most importantly, the research explores the careers of 888 Hungarians who were residents of the State of New York at the time of the war.

The thesis also aims to explore how Hungarian communities were affected by war propaganda, conducted by both the American and the Austro-Hungarian governments. To achieve this, I have conducted in-depth research in hundreds of, predominantly, Hungarian-American newspaper articles from the time of the First World War.

Tracking the movements of regiments with Hungarians in their ranks was beyond the scope of this research but will definitely be explored in the coming years.

Sources and Methods

The research is based on two main source groups: primary source records from American archives, and contemporary, predominantly Hungarian-American newspaper articles. Additionally, relevant works of secondary literature will be explored and utilized.

The articles examined in the thesis include mostly non-mainstream American newspapers and Hungarian-American publications from the time of the War. Some of

the sources were gathered from American archives (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Library of Congress), the rest were downloaded from online databases. The contents of the selected articles were subjected to textological analysis.

There are 514.859 documents in the record group *New York, US, Abstracts of World War I Military Service*, stored in the New York State Archives in Albany, NY. Taking redundancy and other small inconsistencies into account, it can be safely assumed that New York provided at least half a million soldiers for the US Army during the war. This, of course, includes several military categories, aside from those on active duty, the reserve, training camp officers, the National Guard, and even field nurses. According to the database of New York State Military Museum and Veteran Research Center, 13.876 New Yorkers lost their lives in the First World War.

The research is based on the data cards in the record group *Abstracts of World War I Military Service, 1917–1919*, which is kept in the New York State Archives in Albany, NY. The records include the data of every man and woman from the state of New York, who served in the U.S. Military in the world war. Some of them were enlisted, some were inducted, a smaller group was called active, others were appointed into certain positions after the country entered the war. The records were created in 1920, and went through a major revision in 1935, when several

mistakes were corrected. For the prosopographical examination of Hungarian-born soldiers of New York, a Microsoft Access database has been established, in which all available biographical data of 888 individuals were uploaded and processed.

After singling out the Hungarian soldiers and loading their data into a MS Access database, I collected several other primary sources corresponding to the names in my database, which helped “filtering out” non-Hungarians and significantly increased and diversified the biographical data on each individual. The wide variety of sources include birth, marriage, and death registers, ship manifests, census data, draft registration cards, passport requests, obituaries, epitaphs, etc.

Findings

The research into the contents of non-mainstream American and Hungarian-American press of 1914 to 1918 showed that Austria-Hungary, and more specifically Hungary did not appear as a primary enemy of the US in the newspapers. Although the Committee of Public Information had a strong influence on what was allowed to appear in the wartime American press, the point of the research is to find out what picture could American readers gather from these newspapers.

Another part of the examination of the contemporary press focused on Hungarian-American newspapers, in which the results show that the editors maintained a similar level of support toward both the American Army and the Hungarian regiments of the Austro-Hungarian Military. Although Austria-Hungary was one of the enemy countries in the World War, the Hungarian-American press attempted to project a narrative to its readers, in which Germany was the only enemy, and the only reason Austria-Hungary was one of the belligerents was German coercion.

The most important results of the thesis pertain to the Hungarian soldiers in the American Military in WWI. Firstly, two soldiers are introduced in great detail, who fired the first American shot in the World War. Both these soldiers, Alexander Arch (Ács Sándor) and Louis Varady (Várady Lajos) were Hungarian-born Americans. Secondly, the prosopographical research of 888 individuals who were active members of the US Army in the war is presented. An in-depth examination of their data shows a number of different careers, some of which are explored in detail, from soldiers to commissioned officers who lived in the Empire State. The last chapter is devoted to present most of the findings of the research using MS Access, showing varied data sets pertaining to the soldiers' places of origin, age structure, European military service, rank etc.

The discovery and detailed introduction of the history of the first shot, along with the exploration of the military service of Hungarian New Yorkers are considered by the author the principal results of this thesis.