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1.04 Strokovni članek

1.04 Professional Article

DIGITIZATION OF MILITARY REGISTERS OF HUNGARY

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Abstract:

In Hungary, the mandatory military service existed for almost 300 years (1715-2004), and therefore affected the life of a significant number of families. This study gives a review of the digitization project of the military registers of the National Archives of Hungary (NAH). The history of the military register collection dates back to the 1960s, when the original archival records were collected from the county archives and were microfilmed in the microfilm laboratory of the NAH in Budapest. Although the collection is outstanding for family and scientific researchers as well, this unique source type remained almost unknown to researchers for decades. After the digitization of microfilm rolls, the digital images became available online and received a warm welcome from the public.

Key words:

digitization, military registers, Hungary, archival science, microfilm, access, family research

Izveleček:

Digitalizacija madžarskih vojaških registrov

Obvezna vojaška služba je na Madžarskem obstajala skoraj 300 let (1715–2004) in je tako vplivala na življenje številnih družin. Študija podaja pregled projekta digitalizacije vojaških registrov, ki jih hrani Madžarski državni arhiv. Zgodovina vojaškega registra sega v šestdeseta leta 20. stoletja, ko je bilo to arhivsko gradivo zbrano po okrožnih arhivih in mikrofilmano v mikrofilmskem laboratoriju državnega arhiva v Budimpešti. Čeprav je zbirka izredno pomembna za družinske in znanstvene raziskave, je desetletja ostala skoraj neznana. Po digitalizaciji mikrofilmov so digitalizati postali dostopni preko spleta, javnost pa jih je odlično sprejela.

Ključne besede:

digitalizacija, vojaški register, Madžarska, arhivistika, mikrofilm, dostop, družinske raziskave

1. Short History of the Military Registers Collection

Thanks to the cooperation between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the National Archives of Hungary, a genealogical microfilm collection was created between 1956 and 1963, in Hungary. Although the main goal of this agreement was to collect and microfilm the parish registers of the country, besides these, other types of genealogical documents (e.g. census records, military registers, tax lists, name change and nobility cases) were also added to the collection. In brief, the following agreement was signed: the Mormon Genealogical Society granted the technical equipment and raw films needed for the microfilming in the laboratory of the archives, in return the US based society got the negative copy of the microfilms, and a second negative copy remained at

the National Archives, which also kept the technical equipment after the filming had finished. Positive films were developed for general research room use.

In the second part of the ongoing microfilming process, it was Iván Borsa's (Head of Department of Reprography at the National Archives of Hungary) idea to add the military registers to the collection, as it was also considered important from genealogical point of view. As a result of multilateral negotiations – between the National Archives of Hungary, Mormon Genealogical Society, Hungarian Ministry of Home Affairs and Hungarian Ministry of Defense – all the necessary authorizations were obtained. The Hungarian Ministry of Defense stated that no military objection was raised and the data could be transferred to the United States. Although it was unusual in the political constellation of the so-called Kádár Era to make contacts with the USA, still it became considerably significant and profitable for both parties. For the National Archives of Hungary, it gave a chance to emerge from the political and cultural isolation of the post-1956 era, for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it meant the opportunity to collect a Hungarian related genealogical collection on microfilm.

At this point, a nationwide data search was conducted, to begin measuring the quantity of the military registers of Hungary in different county archives. The quantitative data were estimated, there were no strictly developed rules for measuring. It is interesting to note, that in general, the archives mention a low amount of research activity in this type of archival records. In 1962, the military register volumes were transferred to Budapest for microfilming. At that time, microfilming was considered a highly modern technology, which ensured a security copy of certain archival records, and improved the protection of original material.

Parallel to the microfilming of military registers, a new concept was also introduced: in case of a successful and good quality microfilming, the archival records dated between 1867 and 1918 would be sorted out. The words were followed by actions and unfortunately 7.130 kg of military register documents were destructed, this fact further enhances the significance of digitizing, since the microfilm copy became the original archival records.

Years passed by, and in the 1980s, similarly to other European countries, a significant family search fever unfolded, citizens became more and more interested in the history of their families. The popularity of the microfilmed parish register collection began to soar, yet in spite of all these genealogical research activities, the military registers remained unnoticed and hidden deep on the shelves of the archives.

During the 2010s, came the idea that these military registers might be extremely useful for scientific researchers and citizens as well. Due to different publications and lectures presented by the National Archives, slowly but surely, researchers started to discover the importance of these registers in family research.

2. The Content of Military Registers

Military registers (*tatutio militum* in Latin, *Stellungsregister* or *Rekrutierungsregister* in German) are personal registers used for the setting up and supplementing the regular army of the Hungarian Kingdom. They are non-military, civil documents that were created to keep record of men who were summoned to present themselves in front of a committee that decided whether they were fit for military service or not. The registers contain 6 to 10 different columns, where beyond the basic data (name, date of birth, residence, parents' names), other information like health status, physical appearance, and education were also recorded. There are also different types of registers within the military registers, like holiday registers, additional recruiting lists, payout lists, discharge

requests, revision requests. For a successful research in the registers, knowledge of Hungarian, German or Latin language is necessary, depending on the period and the territory where the list was made. The scope of date of the registers laps over 185 years: 1756-1918-(1941), however, the most significant part of the collection was created during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. As for the territorial distribution, it can be noticed that the collection contains some material from the territory of Austria, Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia as well. Fifteen volumes are preserved from the military district of Murska Sobota, between the years 1871 and 1889.

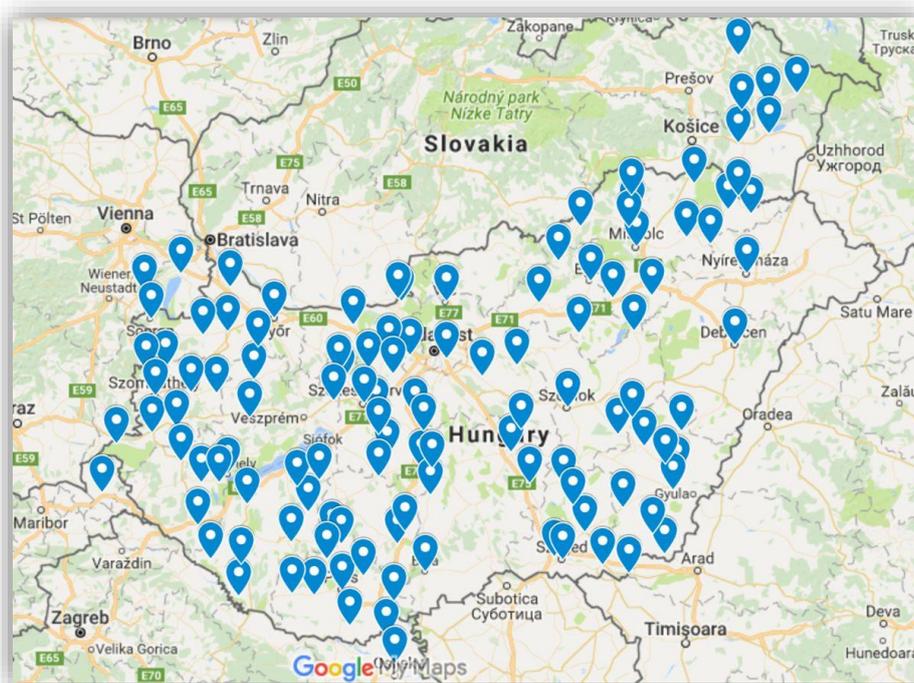


Image 1: Territorial distribution of digitized military register collection of Hungary

The source value of registers is outstanding both for family and scientific researchers; beside the church registers, they may be used for gaining additional information about ancestors. In some cases, when church registers do not exist anymore due to different reasons, military registers might help to continue a blocked family research. For instance, the reformed church registers of Sárszentmihály (Fejér County) were destroyed during the Second World War. Since this village belonged to the military district of Székesfehérvár, researchers may find data in the military registers that are available between 1856 and 1889. An example of an informative data on György Anker, who presented himself in front of the recruiting committee of Kőszeg (Vas County, Hungary) on May 18, 1914. He was classified as unfit for military service due to poor physique. The register gives the following information on him: he was born in Vienna in 1893, he was Roman Catholic, unmarried, got a final exam of secondary education, and at the time of recruiting, he was a law student. His father was Lipót Anker, his mother Baronin Vilma Harg of Babenburg. He was 174 cm tall and lived in Felsőőr in 1914. Here it is worth mentioning, that the registers contain information on people regardless of their religion, which means researchers are not required to know the religion of the person they are interested in before starting their research. Recruiting took place in military districts, therefore knowing the place of residence of the person the researcher is looking for, is essential.

3. Digitizing - from microfilms to digital images

3.1. The Database

In February 2017, the National Archives of Hungary published its digital military registers collection, and 435 thousand digital files became available online free of charge, and can be viewed with a newly developed display device (<http://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/katonaallitas>). Digitization was carried out using a Zeutschel OM1600 microfilm scanner that was purchased in 2012, as part of a public procurement procedure. The database is integrated into the DatabasesOnline system, that includes finding aid databases and in some cases, digitized records. Today, more than 50 thematically extremely different databases are available online within this system. The military register database can be found within the Genealogy/Conscriptions category, and it contains data and images from altogether 20 member archives of the National Archives of Hungary, plus the Budapest City Archives. The Murska Sobota registers can be found within the Vas County Archives of the National Archives of Hungary (MNL Vas Megyei Levéltára).

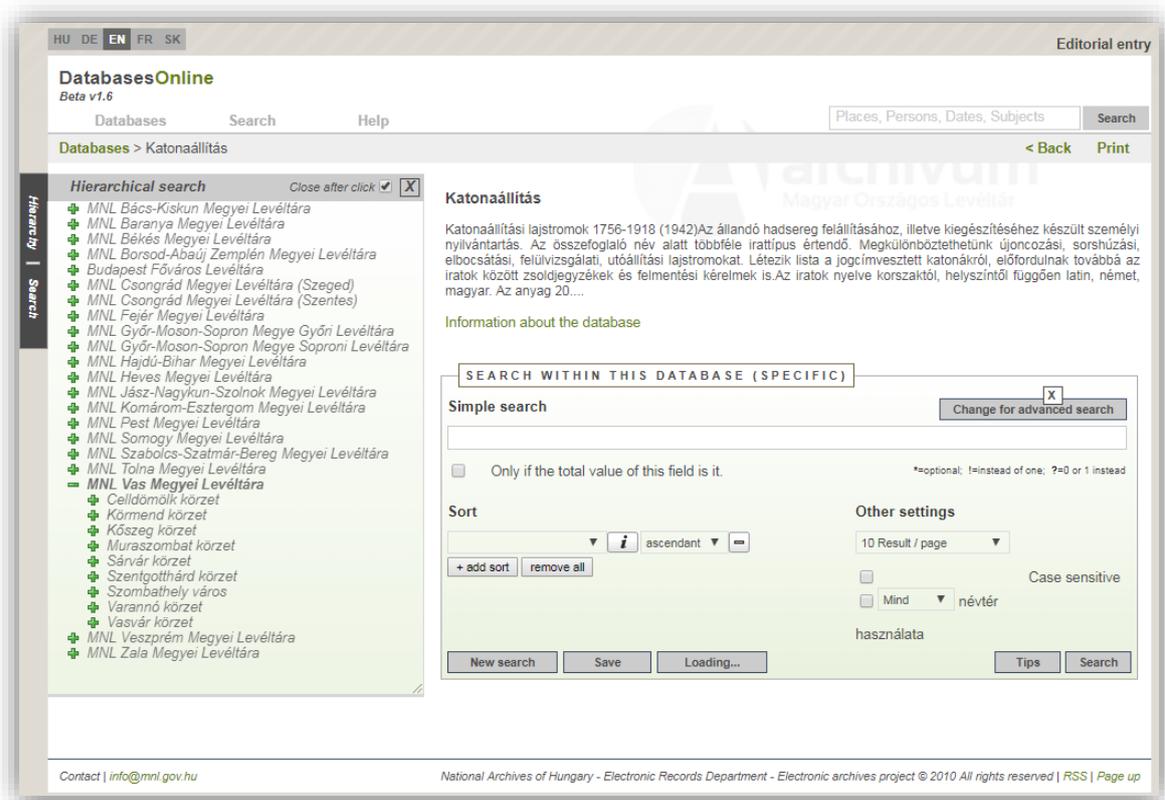


Image 2: Military registers of Hungary on DatabasesOnline

Since the database does not contain personal names, family research is based on the volumes of the military districts. The overview view helps the orientation of researchers. Similar to the parish register indexes, different name lists of the period are also part of the military registers, however, it must be noted that these appear in the most unexpected places within the volumes. Thumbnails of the overview view give researchers an opportunity to easily recognize these possibly available indexes by sight, which enables to start the research process with these indexes.

3.2. Back to the original structure

The collection contains digital images of the microfilm collection, filmed during the 1960s. Digitization allowed a smaller structural change of the microfilmed archival records. The military registers were originally created and preserved in volumes. This arranging principle was overwritten by the optimal use of space, adjusted to the length of the microfilms in 1962. After 55 years, the original structure of the registers was re-established to realistically reflect the creation of documents and facilitate research as well. The characteristic orientation signs of the microfilm rolls, for example, the 'end of roll' or 'continued' signs became unnecessary, therefore they are not part of the digital collection. Today, images of each volume are arranged in the same folder. Access to the volumes is direct, it is not necessary to identify the microfilm roll of the volume searched, though as a reference the database includes the microfilm roll numbers as well. Quantitative data became exact, each folder shows the file number, that indicates how many images/pages it contains.

Technical problems, like vague or missing images, occur during even the most thorough microfilming. Such cases were solved by follow-up additional filming, when extra images were added later at the end of the roll, or sometimes even in a different roll. It is easy to imagine how problematic and time consuming it is to find a missing page on a microfilm. Thanks to digital technology, these images are put back into their original places within the volume.

4. Publicity

According to statistical data, the military registers kept the researchers busy during the months of February, March and April 2017, and outstanding viewing rates were observed.

Military registers created during the First World War proved to be the most popular among citizens. For many families, these registers were able to give information about grandfathers and great-grandfathers, moreover, this part of the registers is easily readable, and researchers do not need paleographic knowledge to interpret the newly gained information. Another important aspect of digitization, and the free online publication of digital images, is that it attracted new researchers, who became aware of the significance of the archives, and are now able to connect and use other archival records as well. Finally yet importantly, the centenary of the First World War also helped to keep the interest high. It has to be noted, that researchers often hit a wall when conducting research in the registers, in many cases, there were no data either from the period, or from the territory they would have been interested in. Today, we are well aware that the collection is far from being complete. As a result of national cooperation, a list, which contains paper-based archival military register material, preserved in Hungarian county and city archives was created. The list can be downloaded from here: <http://adatbазisonline.hu/en/adatbазis/katonaallitas/informacio>.

Comparison of the digitized and paper-based military registers that are known today:

	Digitized archival records	Paper based archival records
Place of preservation	National Archives of Hungary	County Archives of the National Archives of Hungary
Place of preservation	Budapest City Archives	Other city archives
Number of database records	5.916	2.579
Scope of recruiting years	1756-1918-(1942)	1742-1944-(1950)

The question arises: are there any more existing military registers in the archives of the neighboring countries that could be added to the collection?

Seeing the interest of the public, a 'search and find game' has also been launched, where researchers were asked to hand in family photos in digital format that can be connected to the registers. These photos were also published on the researchers' blog of the National Archives of Hungary, called 'Adventures in the Acts' (Aktakaland – www.aktakaland.hu). It is interesting to see that the recruiting data of a famous person, namely István Dankó, popularly known 'Dankó Pista' who became known as a musician of Gypsy origin, was found by a reader. In this way, we can safely state that the project helped the cooperation between archives and citizens to the 'open archives' principle.

POVZETEK

DIGITALIZACIJA MADŽARSKIH VOJAŠKIH REGISTROV

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Zahvaljujoč prizadevanjem Cerkve Jezusa Kristusa poslednjih dni, t. i. mormonov, so bili v mnogih evropskih državah sredi 20. stoletja zbrani in mikrofilmni župnijski registri in drugi dokumenti, povezani z genealogijo. V sodelovanju med mormoni in Madžarskim državnim arhivom med letoma 1950 in 1970 so bili poleg župnijskih registrov zbrani in mikrofilmni tudi madžarski vojaški registri, saj jih štejemo k pomembnim sestavnim delom genealoške raziskave. Vojaški registri so dokumenti, ki so nastali ob vodenju evidence moških, poklicanih pred komite, ki je ugotavljal, ali so sposobni za vojaško službo. Registri imajo 6 do 10 različnih stolpcev, kjer so poleg osnovnih podatkov (ime, rojstvo, prebivališče, imena staršev) navedeni še podatki o zdravstvenem stanju, fizičnem izgledu in izobrazbi. Registri obsegajo časovno obdobje 185 let, nastali so med letoma 1756 in 1918 (1941), največji del zbirke je nastal v času Avstro-Ogrske. Teritorialno obsegajo tudi nekaj gradiva z območja Avstrije, Hrvaške, Slovenije ter tudi Slovaške. Ohranjenih je 15 registrov Vojaškega okrožja Murska Sobota, nastali so med letoma 1871 in 1889.

Ob koncu 20. stoletja je raziskovanje družinskih korenin postalo precej razširjeno, vojaški register pa je kar 60 let ostal neodkrit. Hkrati z digitalizacijo te edinstvene zbirke so se raziskovalci na podlagi različnih publikacij začeli zavedati pomena registra. Februarja 2017 je Madžarski državni arhiv objavil zbirko vojaških registrov, 435.000 digitalnih datotek pa je postalo brezplačno dostopnih preko spleta in jih je možno pregledovati s posebej za to razvitim prikazovalnikom. Kot kaže statistika, je uporaba spletnih vpogledov zelo narastla.

Datoteke so nastale s skeniranjem mikrofilmov in dajejo odlično možnost primerjave med digitaliziranimi mikrofilmi ter digitaliziranimi originali arhivskega gradiva. Med digitalizacijo je bila obnovljena originalna struktura gradiva. Zavedamo se, da zbirka še zdaleč ni popolna, zato je bil izdelan seznam s popisom vseh vojaških registrov na papirju, ki jih hranijo madžarski arhivi. Pojavilo se je vprašanje, ali obstajajo še kakšni tovrstni registri v arhivih sosednjih držav in ali jih je mogoče dodati obstoječi zbirki.

Na podlagi velikega zanimanja javnosti je bila vzpostavljena tudi »igra išči-najdi«, s katero raziskovalce naprošamo, da prispevajo fotografije v digitalni obliki, ki so kakorkoli povezane z registri. Fotografije so objavljene na blogu raziskovalcev v Madžarskem državnem arhivu »Dogodivščine v dokumentih«. Projekt je skladno s principom »odprtih arhivov« pomembno prispeval k sodelovanju med arhivom in družbo.

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