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The officers’ corps of the Székely Border Guard
Hussar regiment no. 11 (1762-1848)

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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Keywords: Székely, Hussar, officer, regiment, military, Habsburg, military rank

Abstract

Between 1762–1764 brought major changes in the Principality (after 1765 Grand Principality) of Transylvania: the Transylvanian part of the Habsburg Military Border was organized in this period. Initially, this entity encompassed six regiments: the Dragoon regiment (with headquarters in Vaida Recea, modern-day Recea),¹ respectively the Romanian infantry regiment no. 1 (Orlat) and 2 (Năsăud), the Székely border guard Hussar regiment (Sfântu Gheorghe), as well as the Székely border guard infantry regiment no. 1 (Miercurea Ciuc) and 2 (Târgu Secuiesc). With these changes a new situation came into existence: the formation of a military force which had three goals (border control, crushing internal revolts and fighting in external campaigns), which wasn't subordinated to neither the province's legislature, nor to the governor but was directly subordinated - through the military commando in Sibiu - to the Viennese Imperial War Council and which recruited (in theory) its personnel from the men of the local families that were obliged to serve as border guardsmen.

Like any other branch of the armed forces, the imperial-royal army was an institution founded on a very strict hierarchical system in which the advancement was possible through the personal and/or collective merits. In this system there were a number of hierarchical classes: common soldiers, non-commissioned officers (corporal, sergeant), cadets, junior commissioned officers (Fähnrich, second lieutenant, first lieutenant), senior commissioned officers (major, lieutenant colonel, colonel) and generals (major general, lieutenant general, general of infantry/cavalry/artillery, field marshal).

The Székely border guard Hussar regiment (from 1798 it held the 11th number) had a tumultuous history by taking part in the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–1779), the war against the Ottoman Empire (1787–1791), respectively in the war series against France (1792–1815). Besides these, the regiment took part in the crushing of the Transylvanian peasant revolt of 1784. In this period, the Grenzer unit fought in over 150 battles on the territory of the Monarchy (modern-day Czech Republic), as well as in the Holy Roman Empire (modern-day Germany), the Romanian principalities, the Great Duchy of Warsaw, respectively in France,

¹ The Romanian border guard Dragoon regiment was disbanded in 1770 and its recruiting area was divided among the Orlat regiment and the Székely Hussar regiment.

riding thousands of kilometers. During the revolution of 1848–1849 the regiment split in two: the majority of the regiment and of the officers fought on the revolutionary side while the subunits with Romanian majority and the aulic officers remained loyal to the Austrian emperor. After the suppression of the revolution, the regiment was reorganized as a regular unit, losing its border guard and Székely quality, and was transferred to the Czech lands. The core of the new regiment was formed by the subunits and officers who remained loyal to Vienna during 1848–1849.

In my doctoral thesis I examined the officers' corps of the Székely border guard Hussar regiment beginning with its formation (1762–1764) until its first reorganization which happened in accordance with law no. 3/1848 of the Transylvanian legislature. The mentioned law had a very ambivalent formulation but it clearly put the unit under the jurisdiction of the Hungarian ministry of war, transforming it from a Grenzer unit into one belonging to the National Guard (*nemzetőrség*).

In this research I examined both the senior and the junior commissioned officers who served in the above-mentioned period. In total, I have identified 425 officers: 21 colonels, 14 lieutenant colonels, 22 majors, 162 captains, 108 first and 98 second lieutenants. I took every one by one military rank and examined them after the following criteria: birthplace, denomination, marital status, carrier patterns (age at enrollment, first rank and type of first military unit, path in the hierarchy, departure from the Székely Hussars, their life after service), respectively any kind of biographical informations.

The unpublished sources that were used to restore the officers' biography and career, is available in the Military Archive (*Kriegsarchiv*) of the Austrian State Archives (*Österreichisches Staatsarchiv*) in Vienna. The majority of the sources can be found among documents of the active personnel (*Personalunterlagen*), respectively those of the supplies granted by the army (*Versorgungsunterlagen*). The personnel identification system used by the Habsburg army before the third decade of the 19th century was a complex (many types of documents used in parallel) and a slightly inefficient one (many errors, lack of documents which spans several year) while the post-1820 system was applied to to the Székely Hussars only partially (the main document, the military register was introduced only after 1849 but the unit had lists of conduit and the unit's registers of births, marriages and death have also been preserved).

Like any other prosopographical research, there was a need for a control group with which my sample can be compared to. I have chosen the 2014 book of military historian Attila

Réfi in which the author had examined 282 senior commissioned officers of the imperial-royal Hussar regiments during the French Wars (1792–1815). I have chosen this group because it is the closest available sample (the same period, mutual officer, the same army and the same branch of cavalry). Besides this, the differences between the two groups have to be also pointed out: Réfi checked the senior officers of the entire hussar class during a prolonged series of war while I examined both officers' categories of one single military unit in the course of eight and a half decades.

Regarding their birthplace, the majority of the researched officers were born in the lands of the Hungarian Crown (291 out of 425, that is 68,4%). One can see the differences between the junior and the senior commissioned officers: while the relative majority of the latter originated from the Kingdom of Hungary, the former's relative majority was born in the Great Principality of Transylvania. In case of the junior regiment officers, the cradle of the majority of Transylvanians rocked in the Székely seats. The other provinces of the Monarchy are poorly represented and the number of officers born outside the Habsburg Empire is rather symbolic (nine persons who originated in the Holy Roman Empire, two-two officers were born in France, respectively in Great Britain and one person was born in Barcelona). The number of officers whose birthplace is unknown is pretty high (77 officers, that is 18,1%).

According to Attila Réfi, 52,97% of his sample came from the Kingdom of Hungary, 13,51% were born in the Great Principality of Transylvania and 21,63% originated in other parts of the Monarchy.² The differences are clear, the senior Székely Hussars being closer to Réfi's sample. This situation stems from the presence of officers with border guards origins (especially among junior officers) who had to perform military duties (unlike the officers in regular units who didn't enroll because of an obligation).

Rank \ Birthplace	Great Principality of Transylvania (Székely seats)	Kingdom of Hungary	The Monarchy's other provinces (Croatian-Slavonian Border)	Other countries	Unknown	In total
Colonels	6 (2)	8	3 (2)	2	2	21
Lieutenant colonels	5 (1)	5	4 (1)	-	-	14

² Réfi 2014.78–79, 84–86.

Majors	9 (4)	7	4	-	2	22
Capitains	81 (46)	32	19 (4)	7	23	162
First lieutenants	51 (31)	18	12 (3)	3	24	108
Second lieutenants	49 (29)	9	12 (1)	2	26	98
In total	201 (113)	79	54 (11)	14	77	425

Regarding the religious denominations, 45,6% were Catholics (194 out of which 190 were Roman Catholics, three officers were Greek Catholics and one is an unspecified Catholic, most probably also Greek Catholic), 27,5% were Protestants (117 out of which 80 were Calvinists, 32 were Lutherans and five junior officers were members of the Unitarian Church), 1,1% were Orthodox (five out of which four were Romanians and one was Serbian). For 25,6% of the group, their denomination is unknown. There is a difference between junior and senior officers: the former have only a relative Roman Catholic majority (41,5%) while among the latter the same denomination has absolute majority (64,9%).

The control group is predominantly Roman Catholic (76,6%). The other denominations being Lutheranism (12,77%), Calvinism (8,51%), Unitarianism (0,7%) and Orthodoxy (0,7%), the Greek Catholics being presented by one person (0,35%).³ The explanation for the grand differences between the two collectives relies in the presence of the Protestant Székely Grenzlers in both categories but especially among junior officers. Besides this, the relatively large number of Protestants among junior regiment officers also shows us the rather ambivalent attitude of the Habsburg army towards religious tolerance.

Among the senior commissioned officers I have found 21 nobles (36,8%) and seven aristocrats (12,2%). Besides them, I have also identified nine officers who were born in unprivileged families but they were ennobled during their lifetime either through the merits of their father and/or because of their own merits (for instance, colonel Gabriel Geringer received nobility at 31 with the entire family through their father and after being awarded the Military Maria Theresia Order he was made an Austrian baron, becoming later baron of Hungary). Among the senior officers there were 30 persons (35%) who were of unknown origin.

In Attila Réfi's prosopographical sample 46,4% were of aristocratic origin, 39,8% were nobles, for 13,2% their social origin is unknown and 7,8% were of non-noble origin, the majority

³ Ibidem. 88–89.

receiving nobility.⁴ The differences can be traced back partially to the low prestige of the border guard regiments (unlike their regular counterparts) which didn't attract the sons of privileged families and partially to the lack of sources, respectively to the lack of the informations from the documents.

Rank \ Marital status	Married (had children)	Unmarried	Unknown	In total
Colonels	13 (7)	3	5	21
Lieutenant colonels	9 (6)	4	1	14
Majors	10 (5)	11	1	22
Capitains	66 (34)	74	22	162
First lieutenants	37 (24)	46	25	108
Second lieutenants	22 (6)	48	28	98
In total	157 (82)	186	82	425

Among the researched officers 43,7% (186) were married, 36,9% (157) were unmarried and for 19,2% (82) their marital status is unknown. Like in other regards, in this case there are also differences between the regiments' officers categories: the majority of the colonels and lieutenant colonels are married while 50% of the majors and the majority of junior commissioned officers are unmarried. This situation has to do with the so-called marriage deposit. Introduced by Maria Theresia, this measure was mandatory for officers who wanted to get married: they had to pay a large sum of money in cash or in real estate and, in the case of their death, their widows and orphans would have received a pension from the interests of this deposit. These sums were imposible to pay, especially for junior officers who after 1815 had rather gloomy perspectives (low wages, poor housing conditions and, in the absence of campaign, the deceleration of the advancement in the military hierarchy).

Regarding the selection of their wives, two phenonmena can be observed: the marriage with the daughters of the local elites, respectively with the female relatives of direct and/or indirect superiors, fellow rank members. Out of the phenomena, the former characterizes the staff officers. Regarding the case of the junior officers, the lack of information doesn't enable an

⁴ Ibidem. 107–108.

exhaustive examination of their marital status but (apparently) among them the military endogamy is more common.

Starting rank Rank	Officer	Cadet	NCO	Soldier	Noble body guard	Other cases	Unknown	In total
Colonels	5	8	-	2	-	-	6	21
Lieutenant colonels	2	7	1	2	-	-	2	14
Majors	3	11	-	5	-	-	3	22
Capitains	13	62	3	49	3	-	32	162
First lieutenants	3	42	1	33	2	-	27	108
Second lieutenants	4	35	-	26	-	1	32	98
In total	30	165	5	117	5	1	102	425

Out of the prosopographical sample, 38,8% (165) started their military service as cadets, for 27,5% (117) the starting rank was that of the common soldier, 7% (30) started out as officers, 1,1–1,1% (5-5) were non-commissioned officers (NCO), a person entered service as a noble bodyguard and another one started as a member of the Hungarian noble insurrection. For 24% (102) the first military rank is unknown.

Among the 282 Hussar officers 48,2% started out as cadets, 33,3% were officers from the start, 14,2% began their service as soldiers, 2,1% as NCOs, 1,4% were members of non-combatant branches, respectively 0,7% had an unknown first rank.⁵ The most visible difference between the two groups is the very low percentage of those who started their careers as junior officers (7% compared to 33,3%). This is due to the small number of aristocrats who (because of the unit's low prestige) didn't transfer themselves to the Székely Hussars.

Rank First unit	Colonels	Lt.- colonels	Majors	Captains	First lieutenants	Second lieutenants	In total
Hussars	6	6	11	82	47	42	194
Dragoons	4	2	2	6	6	7	27

⁵ Ibidem. 90.

Curassiers	1	-	2	3	4	2	12
Chevauxlegers	-	-	-	3	2	1	6
Uhlans	-	1	1	4	-	2	8
Infantry	3	1	1	27	14	5	51
Border guard inf.	-	2	-	1	3	3	9
Other cases	1	-	1	12	7	6	27
Unknown	6	2	4	24	25	30	91
In total	21	14	22	162	108	98	425

The starting military unit of the relative majority of the officers (194, 45,6%) was a Hussar unit. Those who enrolled in a non-hussar cavalry regiment make up the 12,4% (53) of the entire group and among them the majority (27) is held by those who started their career in a dragoon regiment. The third place is held by the infantry (60 out of which 51 started in the regular infantry and nine persons began their military service in border guard infantry units). 6,3% of the sample enrolled in another kind of military branches (ex. noble bodyguard, noble insurrection, Jäger or artillery units). For 21,4% the first military service place is unknown.

Regarding the control group, 48,58% began their career in hussar units, 18,09% enrolled in an infantry unit, 8,87% started out in a cuirassier regiment, 8,16% began in a dragoon unit and 1,06% served firstly in an uhlan unit.⁶ In both cases, those who enrolled in hussar regiments had the relative majority (with similar percentage), while the absolute majority was held by those who began their career in units belonging to the cavalry. The small number of those who enrolled in cuirassier units is caused by the small percent of those born in elite families in the Hereditary Lands.

Out of the entire group, 21,8% (93) had some kind of education. Among them, 8% (34) completed a gymnasium and 5,6% (24) enrolled as pupils. Besides them, 14 officers graduated from a military academy: the group's half were alumni of the Wiener Neustadt Military Academy while the other half graduated from the Technical Military Academy.

Out of the control group, 4,9% (14) graduated from one of the two military academies. Most probably, the low number of academy graduates is caused by the delayed

⁶ Ibidem. 93.

professionalization of the military elite in the Habsburg Monarchy.⁷ The imperial-royal army experienced a gradual process of professionalization during the 19th century but these periods ensued only after the Empire suffered heavy military defeats (Austerlitz, Deutschwagram, Solferino) which in the short or long run put its geopolitical positions in danger.⁸ This phenomenon had effect on the military officer's training: the introduction of an educational filter, the correlation of studies with hierarchical advancement, the obligation of graduating from a military educational institution paved the way to the improving the selection of the military personnel but (during the researched period) this aspect was only in an incipient form.

In average, the Székely hussar's senior commissioned officers enrolled at the age of 17 and half. The youngest was 14 while the oldest enrolled at the age of 26. In total, 63,1% of the group entered service until the age of 18 and this percentage grows to 78,9% if we take into consideration those who began their service at the age of 19–20. In average, the members of the control group enrolled at 17⁹ which corresponds to the results of this research.

Rank	Colonels	Lieutenant colonels	Majors	In average
Time involved				
First junior officer rank	2 years, 4 months	4 years, 6 months	4 years, 8 months	5 years, 2 months
First senior officer rank	18 years, 4 months	17 years, 9 months	23 years, 4 months	19 years, 7 months

In average the Székely hussar's senior officers received their first junior commissioned officer rank around the age 22–23 and their first senior rank was awarded at about 42 years of age. There are major differences between the extreme values: 19 days versus 15 years for junior ranks, respectively one and a half year versus three and a half decades for senior regiment officers.

In average, Attila Réfi's sample got its first senior rank after 20 years of service.¹⁰ The difference between the two samples (four years and nine months) can be traced back to the basic difference between the two samples: one consists of 282 officers who served in a series of wars

⁷ Ibidem. 91.

⁸ Hajdu 1999. 19, 26–28.

⁹ Réfi 2014. 94.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

while my sample examines the both categories of regiment officers who served in a single regiment during a time period of eight and a half decades (including both war and peacetime).

Hussar regiments	Ranks	Colonels	Lt.-colonels	Majors	Captains	First lieutenants	Second lieutenants	In total
Exclusively in regiment no. 11		2	-	-	31	23	23	79
Regimentul no. 1		2	-	2	14	3	-	21
Regimentul no. 2		3	4	3	21	12	9	52
Regimentul no. 3		1	2	-	10	2	1	16
Regimentul no. 4		-	1	1	7	3	3	15
Regimentul no. 5		-	1	-	2	2	-	5
Regimentul no. 6		3	-	1	5	4	5	18
Regimentul no. 7		-	1	-	2	-	2	5
Regimentul no. 8		2	4	3	9	4	5	27
Regimentul no. 9		-	1	2	4	5	1	13
Regimentul no. 10		1	2		5	1	3	12
Regimentul no. 12		2	-	3	2	-	1	8
Croatian-Slavonian hussar regiment		-	-	-	6	2	-	8
Török hussar regiment		-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Esterházy hussar regiment		-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Wurmser hussar regiment		-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Slavonian hussar regiment		-	-	-	1	-	-	1

Out of the entire hussar branch, the hussar regiment no. 2 had the largest overlap with the officers of the Székely hussars (52 persons). This unit had its recruiting district in the Great Principality of Transylvania. Besides this, I have identified a considerably large overlap with the officers' staff of the 1st and 8th hussar regiment, two units that recruited from the Kingdom of Hungary and weren't stationed at all or had stationed for a very short period of time in the eastern part of the Empire. In this case, one can see the high degree of permeability and mobility among the personnel of the hussar units.

The career path of a relatively numerous group (18,5%, 79 persons) was limited exclusively to the Székely hussar unit. The majority of these officers were of Transylvanian origin (77 out of 79, only two officers had senior commissioned officer ranks who were born in Háromszék seat, respectively in Upper Fehér county). Overall, the junior officers had a simpler career path compared to that of their immediate superiors.

Rank	Colonels	Lt.- colonels	Majors	Captains	First lieutenants	Second lieutenants	In total
Dragoon regiment no. 5	1	-	2	5	5	8	21
Székely border guard infantry regiment no. 15	-	3	1	11	3	3	
Infantry regiment no. 31	-	-	-	4	5	2	11

The number of the officers who served outside the hussar's branch is a modest one. The largest overlap is with the dragoon regiment no. 5, the second Székely infantry regiment and the infantry regiment no. 31. Among the mentioned military units, one (the Savoy dragoons) was stationed in Transylvania while the other two recruited from and were stationed permanently (Székely infantry regiment) or occasionally (regiment no. 31) in this area. Here one can see how the geographical proximity of these regiments and the intertwining of the two Székely border guard units had an effect on the officers' corps.

Rank	Colonels	Lt.- colonels	Majors	Captains	First lieutenants	Second lieutenants	In total
Conflicts							
Coalition Wars	9	9	17	63	29	16	143
The Hungarian revolution of 1848–1849	1	-	4	21	13	16	55
a. in the honvéd army or nemzetőr unit	-	-	-	17	11	11	39
b. on the loyalist side	-	-	1	4	2	5	12
c. return to the loyalist side	1	-	3	-	-	-	4
Seven Years' War	1	-	1	1	-	-	3

War of the Bavarian Succession	1	1	1	2	-	-	5
Russo-Turkish War	2	1	8	19	5	-	35
Other military campaigns	2	-	-	4	-	-	6
Didn't participate in any conflict	-	-	-	15	6	1	22

In total, 143 officers of the regiment participated in the Coalition Wars against revolutionary and/or Napoleonic France. This war series had a great impact on the entire continent and the 11th border guard hussar regiment had no exception. The unit fought in the different theaters of war (except Italy), losing four senior and 17 junior commissioned officers (one lieutenant colonel and seven junior officers died during the fight). Many were either wounded and/or taken prisoner.

Another armed conflict that deserves a closer look is the Hungarian revolution of 1848–1849 which caused a loyalty crisis among many imperial-royal officers. Out of 55 Székely hussar officers, 39 fought on the revolutionary side. As mentioned earlier, this situation also caused a different attitude to manifest in the two officers' categories: the senior officers (with the exception of colonel Sándor Sombori who had an ambivalent attitude towards the revolution) remained loyal to Vienna or switched their allegiance to the loyalist side and the majority of the junior officers chose the revolutionary side.

A total number of 22 officers didn't see action in any wars, their majority having served during peace times, especially between 1815 and 1848.

Regarding the purchase of military ranks, I have identified 16 persons (3%) who bought their way through certain parts of the hierarchy. In all of the cases the targeted ranks were junior commissioned officer ranks (the lowest being the Fähnrich, the highest being that of the captain). Two officers climbed more than one step via their purchase: a sergeant became first lieutenant and a second lieutenant bought the rank of a second captain. Besides these situations, three persons bought themselves into the army (two civilians and one member of the Hungarian noble body guard). I have also identified a peculiar case: a captain-lieutenant who sold his rank to a civilian and bought afterwards the rank of his immediate superior.

The members of the researched sample received both domestic and external distinctions (Hessen, Hannover, Prussia, Parma, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Russia). The most awarded internal distinctions were the Silver Medal of Honour (13), the Military Order of Maria Theresa (seven) and the revolutionary Military Order of Merit which was awarded by the Hungarian government (six).

Rank	Colonels	Lt.-colonels	Majors	Captains	First lieutenants	Second lieutenants	In total
Departure							
Transfer	13	7	10	37	29	24	120
Died in officio (killed in action)	2	2 (1)	2	24 (1)	14 (3)	11 (2)	55 (7)
Retirement	4	3	10	67	26	17	127
Quitting the army	1	-	-	10	18	18	47
Excluded from the army	1	-	-	4	6	9	20
Other way	-	-	-	3	-	1	4
Unknown	-	2	-	17	15	18	52
In total	21	14	22	162	108	98	425

In total, 29,8% (127) retired from this regiment, 28,2% (120) transferred from here, 12,9% (55) died during their service in the Székely hussar regiment, 11% (47) left the army, 4,7% (20) were excluded from the army because of disciplinary/political reasons and for 12,2% (52) of the sample the way of departure from the Székely hussars remains unknown. Generally, the seniors tended to leave the unit via transfer, while their underlings tended to retire from this unit.

Out of Réfi's sample, 59,93% retired, 30,49% died as active officers (the majority being killed in action), 8,16% left the armed forces and 1,42% were expelled from the army.¹¹ The differences come from the presence of the junior officers' category who (in many aspects) had a different path compared to their immediate superiors (the Székely hussar unit being their last service place) and this tendency impacts (among other aspects) their departure from the above-mentioned unit.

¹¹ Ibidem. 98–99.

Rank Place of death	Colonels	Lt.-colonels	Majors	Captains	First lieutenants	Second lieutenants	In total
Great Principality of Transylvania	5	4	5	42	22	9	87
Kingdom of Hungary	1	2	4	16	9	2	34
The Monarchy's other provinces	4	3	6	11	3	5	32
Other countries	2	1	-	3	-	3	9
Unknown	9	4	7	90	74	79	263
In total	21	14	22	162	108	98	425

The absolute majority of the sample (263) has an unknown place of death. During my research, this is the first instance when I couldn't articulate a general conclusion regarding an aspect of the research. This is due to the lack of information regarding the junior commissioned officers.

In conclusion, the officers' corps of the 11th Székely border guard hussar regiment that between 1762 and 1848 follows the patterns of the imperial-royal hussar officers who were active at the turn of the 18th and 19th century (the majority was born in the Land of the Hungarian Crown, the relative majority began their service in Hussar unit and as cadets). Out of the two categories of officers, the senior commissioned officers follow Attila Réfi's sample more precisely and the junior officers tend to differ in a number of aspects (e. g. their origin, marital status, both regarding the beginning and the course of their career, simpler career pattern, their loyalty during the Spring of Nations, the large percent of those who quit the army).

Besides these mutual traits, the sample has distinguishable particularities: the Catholics make up only the relative majority, the Protestants have a larger presence, their majority coming from the Calvinists of Háromszék seat and the Transylvanian Saxon Lutherans. The aristocrats have a modest representation. This is also true in the case of those who enrolled in the army as officers. The percent of those who started their career on the lowest hierarchical step (common hussar) is pretty high.

The purchase of ranks is present among the sample's members and, although it is an isolated phenomenon that was used by a handful of officers, it has some particularities worth to be mentioned.