

Hungarian Racehorses during the German Occupation

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Forgiveness, horse!
(William Shakespeare: *Richard II*)

The horse breeding stud farm known as the Csongrad Stud is a little-explored chapter in the German-Hungarian history of World War II, and it only appears in connection with indemnification matters. The German occupiers founded the Csongrad Stud Farm in the summer of 1944. The racehorses, both English Thoroughbreds and trotters, belonging to Hungarian Jewish owners were looted by the Germans and became their property. When, at the turn of 1944/1945, the transfer of goods and animals to the Reich took place as a joint German-Hungarian undertaking, the “Jewish horses” were evacuated on the initiative of the German stud managers. The status of the stud was unique: the racehorses were the only valuables which could be definitively accounted for as assets of German greed. In contrast, the artworks of Hungarian Jewish collectors were confiscated by the Hungarian authorities, not by the Germans.

According to animal statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kingdom of Hungary, approximately 1,300,000 horses were held in Greater Hungary in 1942, including about 6,000 breeding horses in studs and 3,000 racehorses, both English Thoroughbreds and trotters. The number of draft and cavalry horses gradually decreased due to conscription, while the number of other categories, deemed valuable from a breeding perspective, remained largely unchanged. The occupation of Hungary by the German Wehrmacht on Sunday, March 19, 1944, occurred as part of the "Operation Margarethe" ordered by Hitler and came as a shock to the majority of the population, whereas the leading politicians had already anticipated it after Hitler had summoned Miklós Horthy, Hungary's Regent, for a personal meeting at Schloss Klessheim in Salzburg on March 18.

The German takeover of Hungary was precisely prepared and executed smoothly on site, in the land of an ally. The officials and staff typically took up residence in the villas of Hungarian Jews who had already been arrested or forced to leave their homes in the early days of the occupation. Rooms in the estate of the Jewish industrial magnate Manfred Weiss on the magnificent Andrásy Avenue were designated as offices for the special staff of the SS Leadership Main Office (Sonderstab des SS-Führungshauptamtes - SS-FHA). Kurt Becher, head of the special staff, deputy head of the Inspection for Riding and Driving of the SS Equipment Office (Inspektion für Reit- und Fahrwesen des SS-Ausrüstungsstabes), and special representative of Heinrich Himmler, arrived in Budapest with various instructions. The SS-Sturmbannführer, who was well informed and experienced in equestrian sport, immediately focused on the requisition of Hungarian racehorses.

In the 1960s, the Budapest-based Centre for Monetary Institutions (Pénzüntézetzi Központ), along with other Hungarian organizations, handled the applications for indemnification under the

Federal Restitution Act (BRüG) for 62,000 Hungarian-Jewish applicants and collected significant documents for this purpose.¹ Among the archival materials of this supervisory authority², there is a relevant letter that is not accessible in any other archival fond. It likely originated from an applicant. According to this document, on March 25, 1944, General Lieutenant a. D. Béla Hedry, chairman of the Association of Trotters Owners, in agreement with the staff of the Higher SS and Police Leader, the special staff SS-FHA, and the Budapest police authority, sent a circular to the Association members announcing that all American Standardbred trotting horses in Hungary were placed under the supervision of the SS-FHA. Hedry requested that by mid-April the owners provide him with the basic data and current locations of their horses. Moreover, he indicated that the submitted documents would initially remain with the Association's administration but should be made available to the German special staff if needed. The recipients were required to report the status of their animals before March 19 - any subsequent changes afterwards were automatically considered invalid. Simultaneously, and most significantly, Christian horse owners had to prove their non-Jewish ancestry up to four grandparents. Hedry revealed that he would forward the Aryan certificates to the special staff. As indirectly proven by other archival sources and becoming clear in light of later events, the German-Hungarian delegation, driven by a similar motivation, paid a visit to the headquarters of the Hungarian Gallop Association (Jockey Club) at the same time. During this visit, they focused their attention on the even more valuable English Thoroughbreds registered in the Hungarian Stud Book.

Regardless of how confidently the Germans presented themselves in the two horse racing clubs, the ownership of the "Jewish horses" could not be seamlessly transferred to them. In the early period of the occupation, the rules of German-Hungarian cooperation game were quite flexible, and despite considerable German pressure, the roles were not yet distributed.



Racetrack in Budapest. Copyright: Fortepan /Kölcsey Ferenc Dunakeszi Városi Könyvtár / Petanovits fényképek

Out of premature obedience, Döme Sztójay's collaborating government brought dozens of anti-Jewish regulations in the spring of 1944 into force. The notorious decree 1600/1944 M.E. regarding the registration and confiscation of Jewish property was published in the Hungarian Official Gazette on April 16, 1944. The paragraphs obligated the Jewish citizens of the country to register their assets with the tax directorates responsible for their localities. Racehorses were considered objects of value and thus had to be noted on the forms. The Horse Breeding Department of the Ministry of Agriculture was already aware of their existence, as names of the Jewish owners had been shared by the heads of the two racing associations. Kurt Becher, later named as the "Horse Dictator" by the Hungarian historian Jenő Lévai, closely monitored the events of which he was the driving force.

Two days after the publication of the decree, the Ministry of Agriculture informed the special staff of the names of 150 English Thoroughbreds belonging to approximately 45 Jewish owners, which it had taken under lockdown in accordance with the decree and its own regulations. This meant that the Ministry had taken over the possession of the racehorses. The named horses were allowed to remain in their stalls and participate in planned horse races, but the names of their original owners gradually disappeared from sports news and specialist publications. A similar decision, regarding the further fate of the trotters, was also made, but the relevant document is missing from the archival records.

Minister of Agriculture Béla Jurcsek announced at the cabinet meeting on 17 May that representatives of the Waffen-SS had asked him to establish a racing stable at the stud farm in Dióspuszta, owned by the Jewish Halász family, and he was also asked to purchase 140 racehorses for this purpose. The secretary recorded Prime Minister Sztójay's reaction as follows: "The minister should not conduct bilateral negotiations with the representatives of the SS. If such a request exists, it should be presented by Edmund Veesenmayer, the Reich plenipotentiary."³

Notably, at that time approximately 60 SS soldiers were stationed at this traditional stud farm for English Thoroughbreds, which was known beyond Hungary's borders. The Halász family members left their estate and found refuge in the capital or even in Transylvania. About 40 of their racehorses were already in the possession of the ministry. It cannot be documented whether Veesenmayer acted as a mediator in this matter, but it is known that he attended the well-visited horse race for the prestigious Millennium Prize in the presence of the Minister of Agriculture on 21 May, observing the events on the rain-soaked, slippery racetrack with binoculars from the VIP stand.⁴ If the mentioned parties had discussed the issue of the Dióspuszta stud farm, Minister Jurcsek would certainly have informed Veesenmayer that it had already been administratively assigned to the Kisbér State Stud Farm, complicating the processing of matters in favor of the German side.



Veesenmayer at the horsetrack. Copyright: <https://filmhiradokonline.hu/watch.php?id=5723>

Establishment of the German Stable

The following day, Minister Jurcsek raised the Germans' proposals regarding the use of the stud farm again at the cabinet meeting, without referencing his meeting with Veesenmayer. This time, he listed other stud farms that could be made available to the Germans. One option was the estate of the Jewish family of Manfred Weiss in Derekegyház, located in southern Hungary in Csongrad County. Jurcsek further stated that he believed it would be reasonable for the Hungarian government to donate a “certain number of horses” to the Germans. The cabinet agreed to the proposal — without taking any specific measures.⁵

The plan concerning Derekegyház was quite deliberate: Kurt Becher had taken over the Budapest heavy industry conglomerate of the Weiss family on Himmler's orders in the same month, along with all movable and immovable assets, and in return, he allowed the 45-member family to leave Hungary for Switzerland and Portugal. Such exchanges were not new phenomena during the Nazi era, and Becher had enough experience, as he had previously been involved in negotiations with the German-Jewish Oppenheim family, which also happened to maintain a horse stud farm.⁶

Following the announcement of Decree 1600/1944, the extreme right-wing press was flooded with reports about the legendary wealth of the country's Jewish population. Art collectors and factory owners were depicted as a disgrace to the Hungarian nation. On 29 June, the Hungarian Racing Newspaper “Lóverseny Újság”, announced that from then on, the Jewish horses would race under the name of the Csongrad Stud Farm.⁷ The registration of this pseudonym proceeded correctly, in accordance with § 158 of the competition regulations of the Secretariat of the Jockey Club. On the same day at 2:47 p.m., the new formation made its debut with the racehorse *Bors* in a flat race in the Hungarian capital, and the following day, *Turmac*, a three-year-old brown stallion, even won the prestigious Mátyásföld Prize, which awarded a prize of 5,000 Pengő to his competition account.⁸ Since the records of the racing associations from that fateful year have completely disappeared, we can only speculate that the Csongrad Stud Farm also took over the accounts of its "athletes."

While the term "Csongrad Stud" appeared occasionally in Hungarian daily newspapers, it made a real round only in the specialized press. Under the heading "Change of Ownership," the *Hungarian Racing Calendar*, the official journal of the Jockey Club, in its 7 July 1944 issue published

the names of the original owners and their racehorses which were transferred by the April decree first to the ownership of the Ministry of Agriculture and then from its possession to the Csongrad Stud. In the announcement of this latter transaction, the Hungarian Ministry acted as the seller and the new racing stable as the buyer. The official journal of the Trotting Association also published changes of ownership regarding the trotters in its July edition. The final result: The Hungarian state appropriated a total of 178 gallopers and 113 trotters from Jewish ownership and transferred 71 gallopers and 75 trotters from this stock to the German Csongrad Stud. The victims of these transactions were more than 60 Hungarian-Jewish horse or racing stable owners. Most of them, depending on whether they lived in the provinces or in the capital, were at that time suffering abroad in concentration or forced labor camps, in the Budapest ghetto, in so-called Jewish safe houses, or - in fortunate cases - had found asylum with Christian acquaintances.

The racing newspaper reported on the "glorious future" of the Csongrad Stud in its August issue and hinted at an open secret: "The German racing stable operating under the name Csongrad Stud is opening its doors in Derekegyház. Ernst Heicke, head of the stud and former editor of the Cologne Sports Journal, informed us that *Samurai*, the excellent German stayer, is intended to serve as the stud's stallion." Furthermore, Heicke shared the names of the 17 broodmares of the stud and the 10 mares expected from Germany with the reporter and mentioned that the lot would be supplemented by 23 additional English Thoroughbreds from Regent Horthy's brother's stable, which indeed happened shortly thereafter. These were the first and last "Aryan horses" in the German stud. By September, the racing stable already housed 30 mares - hopes for the future - a significant booty, considering that a mare can produce 8-15 offspring in her fertile years.

Evacuation of the Country

After Hungary was declared a war zone by the newly established Arrow Cross government of Ferenc Szálasi in October 1944, the issue of evacuating movable property became the focus of discussions. The framework for this process was established on 14 November in Budapest through an agreement signed by Emil Szakvary, Minister for Industry; Vilmos Hellenbronth, Minister without Portfolio for War Economy; Edmund Veesenmayer, Reich Plenipotentiary; and Constantin Boden, Reich Economic Commissioner.⁹ Under the basic claim of this agreement, the ownership rights of goods relocated to the Reich remained unaffected, the evacuated enterprises were to continue to exist as Hungarian companies beyond Hungary's borders, and the costs of future repatriation to Hungary to be shared jointly by the Hungarian and German sides.

The migration of goods began, with its details outlined in numerous regulations from the Hungarian ministries. At this time, approximately 6,000 breeding horses from the Hungarian state studs were moving from the eastern part of the country to Transdanubia, and 2,600 horses were stabled in the boxes of the largest state studs in Kisber and Babolna, where some English Thoroughbreds from private breeders were also located.

Tibor Pettko-Szandtner, the chief stablemaster and head of the Horse Breeding Department of the Ministry of Agriculture was officially appointed with the task of evacuating the breeding horses. In reconstructing the subsequent events, we mainly rely on eyewitness accounts written by him and his associates, as well as on the private archives of some key figures involved in the

evacuation process. Pettkó-Szandtner did not return to Hungary after World War II, and the documents, which were transferred to the Reich from his department, disappeared without a trace in the aftermath. No records of this operation are available in the archives of the German partner ministry. However, it is known that Franz Wettengel, the state stud master and an employee of the Horse Breeding Department of the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture, invited his Hungarian colleague to a meeting in Vienna in November 1944 and offered housing for a smaller contingent, a total of only 1,200 Hungarian breeding horses, in the Lower Bavarian Bergstetten, a district of Kaisheim. This estate had been breeding horses for over a century under the Wittelsbach Royal Family until 1936, when the Wehrmacht had opened a remount depot on the site to house, train, and cared for draft and riding animals for military use. . By the end of 1944, the local stables and the workers' apartments belonging to them were almost completely emptied.

On 20 November Alajos Pusztai, a proficient German language user and editor of the stud book for the Kisbér State Stud Farm was appointed by Pettkó-Szandtner, "to go to Bergstetten on November 24 with the group of horses formed from Kisbér's stock," and the next day he signed a protocol written in German, stamped by his ministry. The document was also to be signed by Edmund Veesenmayer and Fidel von Pálffy, the Minister of Agriculture in Szálasi's cabinet. Nevertheless, the document wasn't signed just by him - at least there are no visible signatures from Veesenmayer and Pálffy on the only accessible copy, which remained in Pusztai's legacy archive. The German text included the usual statement that the animals were the property of the Hungarian state and would be repatriated to Hungary duty-free at a later date. Such protocols were not uncommon in the Hungarian history of property evacuation from the fall of 1944 to the winter of 1945, but they are preserved as copies or English translations in the holdings of the Property Control Branch of the U.S. Allied Commission for Austria (USACA), and as such, they are completely unsigned.¹⁰

P R O T O K O L L

aufgenommen in Budapest am 21. November 1. J. im Oberlandstallmeisteramt des kgl. ung. Ackerbauministeriums.

Unterfertigte erkennen an, dass auf Grund Zustimmung des Ministerrates das provisorisch in Deutschland untergebrachte und im Eigentum des kgl. ung. Staates befindliche Pferdmaterial, ferner die unter Aufsicht des ungarischen Jokeyclubs stehende Neuner Komitee gehörigen Vollblüter, sowie ebenfalls im Eigentum des kgl. ung. Staates befindlichen ungarische Rinderherde und Urschafe und sonstiges Zuchtmaterial zu einem von der ungarischen Regierung festzustellenden Zeitpunkte zollfrei zurücktransportiert werden kann und dass das im beiliegenden Verzeichnis angegebene und im gegenwärtigen Protokoll Gegenstand bildende Zuchtmaterial auch zur Zeit der Evakuierung Eigentum des kgl. ung. Staates ist.

Das in der Beilage dieses Protokoll angeführte und im Privateigentum befindliche Vollblutmaterial fällt ebenfalls unter diese Beurteilung wie das im Vorhergehenden behandelte und im Eigentum des kgl. ung. Staates bildende Zuchtmaterial.

Datum wie oben.

Wesenmayer m.p.
Bevollmächtigter und Gesandter
von Gross-Deutschland in Ungarn

Pálffy m.p.
kgl. ung. Ackerbauminister.

Für die richtige Abschrift!
Budapest, den 21. November 1944.



Siber von Pettkó-Szandtner
Generalmajor a. D.
Oberlandstallmeister.

The protocol signed only by Pettkó-Szandtner. Courtesy of Béla Lomniczi

The most valuable evacuation transports left Hungary as planned but often arrived in the Third Reich unexpectedly. The wagons carrying for example the gold reserves of the Hungarian National Bank exemplify the case. Moreover, the valuables collected from Hungarian Jews in accordance with the mentioned April decree, furthermore, the art objects from the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, as well as the paintings from Jewish collections also reached the territory of the Reich in different sites and dates. In contrast, the relocation of the horses to Bergstetten was not only properly negotiated but, according to numerous post-war accounts from the accompanying staff, also proceeded smoothly. The 120 stud employees and their family members, along with the animals, reached Bergstetten in three railway transports in November and December 1944 via Donauwörth, where they settled in comfortably and experienced the end of the war without any particular incidents.

The fate of the horses kept in the German racing stable was quite different. Although the center of the stud was in Southern Hungary, not all Csongrad horses were housed there; many remained in the capital or at the stud center in Alag, near Budapest. One of the few archival documents providing details about the Csongrad Stud reveals that the last location of the stud during the autumn months of 1944 was on the estate of Princess Stephanie (daughter of King Leopold II of Belgium) and her husband in Northern Hungary, Oroszvár, where many fleeing German officers temporarily found shelter during these critical months.

Another archival document indicates that the very first "Csongrad" horses - seven covered and four non-covered broodmares - were transferred in September and November to the estate management in Rödlin, Mecklenburg, whereas four stallions were sent to the SS Riding School in Sehuschitz, located in occupied Czechoslovakia.¹¹ In December, approximately 60 English Thoroughbreds were evacuated by train to Vienna and from there delivered further to Stockerau. This action was not part of the evacuation conducted under joint German-Hungarian management but was initiated on the order of the German stud managers. The Hungarian horse trainer Robert Hitsch was compelled to attend the transport. After the war, he returned to his homeland and recalled in a newspaper interview in the summer of 1945 that the evacuated horses arrived shortly before the end of the war in Písek in South Bohemia.¹² However, twenty years later, he mentioned the nearby place Hluboká as the final destination in his testimony under oath. No one asked him what happened to the "Jewish trotter horses" - this remains an unanswered question in the equestrian history of Hungary to this day.

Accomplished and non-accomplished restitution

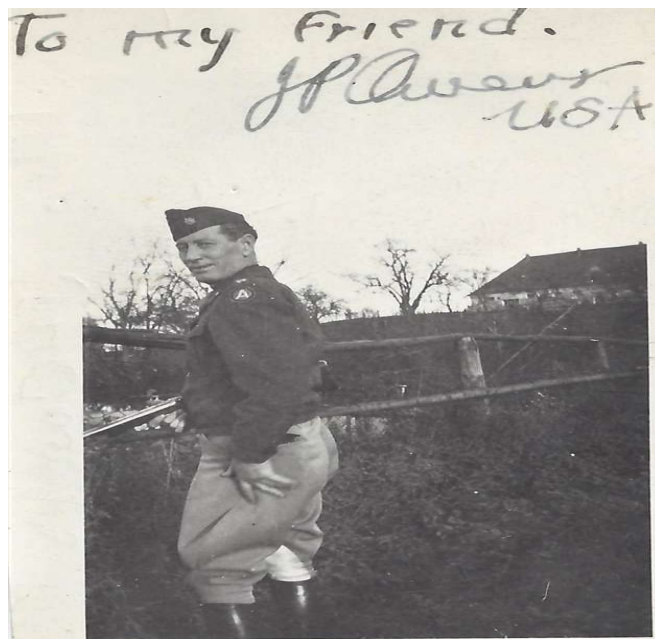
Bergstetten, along with the Hungarian horses housed there, was occupied by the 7th American Army on 25 April 1945, without any combat actions. The US Army recognized the animals as property of the Hungarian state and placed a sign reading "Royal Hungarian Stud Farm" at the entrance of the horse center.

From then on a tumultuous period began, which was depicted and documented in public recollections in a very similar way. After the "Hungarian state stud farm in exile" was taken over by the 3rd American Army in the summer of 1945, Major James Pryce Owens moved into Bergstetten and as result of his allegedly vulgar manner became quite unpopular among the Hungarians, who at first found themselves stateless in the American zone.

There were no major problems with the day-to-day care of the animals and their companions, but their future seemed bleak. Hungary was a former ally of Nazi Germany and was thus regarded as an "ex-enemy." Many months had to pass before the US government paid attention the question of potential restitution of the animals to Hungary.



Donauwörth in 1945, Courtesy of Jeffrey Yoest



Major James Pryce Owens, Courtesy of Jeffrey Yoest



Hungarians in Bergstetten, Courtesy of Ferenc Böröcz

In the meantime, Owens' staff exploited Hungarian horses in Bergstetten. Some were given away, others auctioned to the local farmers. The most painful act was when Colonel Fred L. Hamilton, chief of the American Remount Service appeared in Bavaria and selected 105 Hungarian horses to have them shipped to the United States in October 1945 and July 1946, along with other selected German or foreign breeding animals.

The Hungarian government received the first promising item of news regarding the potential return of industrial and cultural goods relocated to the Reich on March 19, 1946. Arthur Schoenfeld, the American ambassador in Budapest, presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy, requesting a list of the evacuated goods and animals, adding that the US government was considering the initiation of provisional restitution to Hungary.¹³

A great deal of research, to be carried out with a lot of hardships, was started into relocated goods at the Prime Minister's Office in Budapest. It turned out that most of the copies of the shipping documents and further certification of the transports were completely missing and the key persons who accompanied the wagons had not yet returned. Moreover, there was a persistent news blackout between Hungary and the occupied zones. No one knew exactly where the goods had ended up.

Although the Hungarian People's Courts were investigating war crimes committed by ex-functionaries, and a process similar to the denazification procedures in Germany was initiated in the country, pieces of the puzzle originating from these investigations were found and put together very slowly. It came to light, among other facts, that approximately 24,000 railway cars filled with goods had left the country in the final months of the war. The Ministry of Agriculture

could only ascertain that “breeding horses along with harnesses had been delivered from the horse breeding centers of Mezöhegyes, Kisbér, and Bábolna, as well as from private stables.” Further efforts to compile the list were deemed unnecessary when the US government invited Hungarian restitution missions to the American zones of Germany and Austria in July 1946. Horse breeding expert Sándor Anker was sent to Frankfurt am Main on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture. After the group’s initial orientation, the restitution process took a positive turn: in August, gold bars of the Hungarian National Bank, which had been transferred from the Austrian Spital am Phyrn to Frankfurt, were returned to Hungary, and in December, Hungarian valuables from the Munich Central Collecting Point were delivered back to Budapest.

The first group of horses from Bergstetten was scheduled for return in January 1947: 290 horses from the state stud farms and 15 English Thoroughbreds from both Jewish and non-Jewish owners. The latter, the English Thoroughbreds, had either stayed in the stud Kisbér in 1944 or were foals born in exile. Some of the broodmares were pregnant, as professional covering had continued in Bergstetten. The greatest sensation was the arrival of *Sultan Mahomed*, one of Hungary's most successful stallions. Interestingly enough, *Medjidje*, an eight-year-old black pony mare from the Bábolna children's brass band, also returned.

Following this first shipment of horses from Bergstetten, another 163 breeding horses and 8 English Thoroughbreds were returned in October of the same year. Some of the gallop horses participated in the first horse races at the newly restored Munich-Riem racecourse, commissioned by the Americans. German newspapers reported from time to time about the speedy legs of *Markesman* and *Pansy* but neglected to add that they were of Hungarian origin.

The following year also began with a good omen: in January 1948, the Hungarian agricultural sector welcomed the arrival of the last 180 animals and stud employees from Bergstetten in their homeland.

The Hungarian horses transported from Bavaria to the United States were also planned to be restituted in the fall of 1947. All the details had been elaborated and the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture agreed to welcome the sires and mares in the harbor of Trieste. However, the State Department unexpectedly stopped the action and a summoned Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services of the United States Senate started to negotiate the “Question of Ownership of Captured Horses” in December 1947.¹⁴ Shortly after the livestock was declared war booty, Hungary was forced to renounce its 105 valuable horses. This unfriendly gesture was already a signal of the beginning of the Cold War. In January 1948, a conflict erupted between Hungarian border troops and US soldiers at the Austro-Hungarian border. In response, Washington ordered the expulsion of the Hungarian restitution mission from the American zone within 48 hours. After this, horses could only be restituted from the French and British zones or from Austria. The arriving horses from verifiable private ownership were returned to their rightful owners, but horse breeding and racing gradually fell victim to communist nationalization measures.

QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP OF CAPTURED HORSES

HEARINGS
BEFORE A
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE
EIGHTIETH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION
ON
DETERMINING THE BASIS OF THE CONTEMPLATED
RETURN TO HUNGARY OF CERTAIN HORSES
SAID TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO THE
UNITED STATES AS CAPTURED
WAR MATÉRIEL

DECEMBER 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 15, 18, 19, 22, AND 23, 1947

Printed for the use of the Committee on Armed Services



https://books.google.de/books?id=8KsBNgJGUVQC&printsec=frontcover&hl=de&source=gbs_ge_suummary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Given the fact that the time of transfer of the Hungarian animals to the Reich differed and involved both state and private studs, it is a challenging task to compile statistics on the loss and restitution ratio. This endeavor is further complicated by additional events: The Red Army secretly deported about 270 trotters and 226 English Thoroughbreds from Hungary to the USSR in 1945.¹⁵ The trotters were renamed, making it impossible to trace them. In contrast, most thoroughbreds were recorded in Soviet stud books, and many of their descendants have remained registered racehorses to this day. Furthermore, Hungary had to hand over approximately 4800 breeding horses to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia as part of the reparations mandated by the Potsdam Conference by 1948.

The effort to quantify these losses seems futile, especially since plenty of relevant documents were confiscated during a large-scale sabotage trial against 60 employees of the Ministry of Agriculture by the state security authority in 1948. However, it can be reasonably assumed that about one-third of the Hungarian horses did not survive the hardships of World War II.

Tracing the Footsteps

The fate of the English Thoroughbreds, mostly of Jewish ownership, was shaped in a much more transparent manner: the first postwar Czechoslovakian Stud Book published the names of 50 English Thoroughbreds with a terse note: "Imported from Hungary in 1945."¹⁶ Their restitution could not even be included in the negotiation agenda due to the frozen relations between the two neighboring countries.

There are documents about the post-war check of the Jockey Club's employees' behavior during the German occupation held in the fonds of the Budapest City Archives. The testimonies provide evidence that beside Kurt Becher and Ernst Heicke, Hans Stapenhorst and Christian Weber were also key figures in the Csongrad Stud. Weber was considered an emblematic figure of the Nazi regime: on behalf of the SS, he supervised various equestrian affairs, and as the founder of the race for the Brown Ribbon promoted by the Nazi regime, he was a key organizer at the Munich-Riem racetrack. With the exception of Weber the three other protagonists survived the war.

In the 1960s, some former Hungarian breeders of Jewish descent living in the Western world submitted restitution claims under the Federal Restitution Act (BrüG). As citizens of their host countries, they had better prospects for compensation than their former colleagues living in Eastern Bloc Hungary. The restitution offices and chambers of the Federal Republic had become more cautious after the lawyer Hans Deutsch's notorious case - he represented Budapest art collector Franz von Hatvany - and they sought testimonies from an array of witnesses. Thus, Becher, Heicke, and Stapenhorst were also called to testify multiple times or submit written statements. Becher and Stapenhorst alluded to their alleged forgetfulness but clearly denied that the Germans had paid money for the "Jewish horses" in Hungary. In contrast, Heicke was much more talkative, although he was rambling. It is not worth quoting him verbatim, as his memories lack coherence. However, it is evident from his statements that he intended to accompany the Csongrad horses to Bavaria but had to leave them in Písek amid the chaos of war, blaming exclusively Czechoslovakian authorities for what subsequently happened to the animals.¹⁷



Key figures of the Csongrad Stud Farm: Becher, Weber, Heicke. Becher: <http://degob.org/portrait.php?id=becher>. Weber: In: Szent György, June 15, 1939. Heicke: Courtesy of Georg Lange.

In Hungary, investigation into the fate of the "Jewish horses" was also conducted as part of the restitution efforts. However, almost invariably, the eyewitnesses lacked either the knowledge or the courage to testify honestly. The "investigators" of the Budapest Centre for Monetary Institutions managed to insert together only 9 original documents from 1944 regarding the Csongrad Stud into the files.

So far, not many other documents have come to light. It is peculiar that the existence of the German racing stable was not at all revealed to the German public during 1944, the year of the founding of the stud. Similarly, it does not appear in later historical accounts concerning the final stage of World War II in Hungary.

¹ Although, according to the legal provisions, applicants living in Hungary were not eligible, the Hungarian authorities conducted negotiations with the Bonn Ministry of Finance from 1957 to 1971. In 1971, the Bonn Ministry of Finance and the Hungarian General Foreign Trade Bank signed a global agreement amounting to 100,000,000 DM. In 1973, diplomatic relations between the two countries were established.

² MNL OL (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár – National Archives of Hungary) XIX-L-20-o.

³ MNL OL K27 19440517.

⁴ Hungarian Newsreel: <https://filmhiradokonline.hu/watch.php?id=5723>

⁵ MNL OL K27 19440522.

⁶ The German horse stud farm, *Schlenderhan*, founded by Eduard von Oppenheim in 1869, was transferred to the SS in 1942.

⁷ *Lóverseny Újság* (Newspaper for Horse Racing), June 29, 1944, 1.

⁸ *Magyar Versenynaptár* (Hungarian Racing Calendar), June 07, 1944, 248.

⁹ Agreement on the Continuation of Production, MNL OL XIX-L-20-r, box 42.

¹⁰ NARA DN1927, Record Group: 260, Roll: 0105. <https://www.fold3.com/image/306512060>.

¹¹ MNL OL XIX-L-20-o, box 34.

¹² In: *Kossuth Népe*, July 9, 1945, 1.

¹³ The Coordinating Committee of the Allied Control Authority adopted the report on Quadripartite procedures for restitution (CORC/P/46/143) in April 1946.

¹⁴ Question of Ownership of Captured Horses. Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate. Eightieth Congress. First Session on determining the basic of the contemplated return to Hungary of certain horses said to have been brought to the United States as captured war material. December 3, 5, 8, 9, 15, 18, 19, 22 and 23, 1947. Washington 1948.

¹⁵ ÁBTL (Historical Archives of the State Security Services) 3.1.9.-V-86000/33.

¹⁶ Plemenná Kniha pro Československou Republiku Plnokrevné Koňstvo, Svazek IV. Praha 1952.

¹⁷ BADV (Federal Office for Central Services and Unresolved Property Issues) I/N 4345-I WKN 32/62 - Wi 107/64.