



# History of the fortification system









The system of historic forts is situated in and around the "twin" towns of Komárom, Hungary, and Komárno, Slovakia on opposite banks of the Danube River. Even taken individually the forts on both sides are genuine historic and cultural treasures, representing the highest level of military architecture of their time and having survived unaltered since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These forts, and their predecessors have been built and rebuilt over the centuries, but their current forms show the most skilled building techniques and styles from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1852-1890). Their survival has kept the talent of their builders – architects, engineers, officers, and masons, as well as other craftsmen and workers – and of their former occupants – soldiers, refugees and deportees – alive. These men represented several nations and nationalities living in this region of Europe, and therefore in its appearance, location and substance the fort represents a unique cross-section of the continuous common history of Central Europe from Roman times up to the Cold War.

In accordance with the archeological findings Celts lived in the area of Szűny (a part of today's Komárom), then Brigetio was built onto this colony later on, which was one of the most significant fortresses of Pannonia's Province of the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.. A legion consisted of 4000-6000 persons could be stationed on the territory of Brigetio, which was walled off by a colossal stone-wall. The archeological explorations proved tracks of a garrison town, several watch-towers and numerous smaller forts.

At the era of Béla IV – after the Mongol invasion of Hungary – a stone-castle was built, then in the 15<sup>th</sup> century – during the reign of Mátyás Hunyadi – authentic palaces, magnificent renaissance buildings were founded in Komárom. Mátyás stationed a great part of his Danubian fleet beneath the walls of the castle. Komárom was equally an inland and water-, as well as an economic and military point of junction.

After Buda became captured by the Turkish, Ferdinand I decreed the castle of Komárom's fortification. Pietro Ferabosco drew up the plan of the so-called Old Fortress in compliance with the modernest castle-architectural principles. The completed castle was considered as a serious soundness in the border-fortress system against the Turkish, thus it was defended by the war-masses of important armed forces, infantry, cavalry, garrison-artillery and from the direction of the rivers by the sloops (from the 17<sup>th</sup> century they were named as boatmen).

The real ordeal of the Old Fortress was in 1594, when Grand Vizier Sinan with his one hundred thousand persons army, after capturing Tata then Győr, proceeded against Komárom. The castle held on valiantly and repulsed the superior forced Turkish army.



The town – albeit burnt down nearly to the ground during the siege and its preparations – was rebuilt again. Moreover the council of war functioning beside the royal court decreed the building of a new bulwark after 1663. The new bastion, the New Fortress was built by taking into consideration the modernest Italian and French fortification experience. The building complex was finished in 1673. In parallel with the erection of the fortress the bridge-abutment forts situated on the Vág-Danube side and on the right bank of the river Danube were renovated and fortified as well. Consequently this strategic point was guarded by five stronghold-elements and one fortress section. The fortress system lost its importance after the Turkish occupation of Hungary and the town utilizing the peaceful period began to flourish. Komárom became the fifth biggest town – in number of inhabitants - of the country in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Napoleon wars Vienna came under fire as well and in 1809 the imperial court had to escape, the emperor Ferenc I (Francis I) and the king took refuge in - that time with feverish haste fortified - Komárom. In July of 1809 the Monarch decided to have Komárom built to the greatest fortress system of the area, as big that it is suitable to a secure hold of an army of 200 000 persons. Following the monarchical decision engineering-corps major general Dedovich, who was the director of the castle's fortification as well, accomplished the projecting on the basis of the war experience.

An engineering staff led by field marshal Marquis Chasteler finished the first part of the fortress system's project. This project set the purpose of strengthening the castles and modernizing the bridge-heads and the work continued under the leadership of the field marshal. In compliances with the plans the extension of the fortress system had to be continued on the right bank of the river Danube as well. They wanted to build two independent elements next to the already existing bridge-head fort - the Star-Fortress - on the right bank. Therefore on this side of the river the Treasury had to buy a land on the Sand-Hill of Monostor and next to the road leading to Nagyigmánd. The preceding was the Zichy estate and after the agreement with the family (in 1817) the Treasury acquired the territories selected for the building.

The building project started, but could not be completely accomplished owing to the revolution and war of independence in 1848 – 49. During the revolution of Budapest the commandant of the fortresses was lieutenant general Friedrich Metz, who was followed by the lieutenant colonel István Majthényi in the middle of September. He immediately set himself to have the earthwork of the fortresses done as well as to the organization of the army of defence since the defense of the systems of fortification – according to a plan from 1826 – required 14 000 infantrymen, 1800 artillerymen and 1 200 cavalries as well as 400 cannons. At the end of 1848 as a consequence of the alteration of the war of independence's strategic situation – after the Hungarian main body of the army retreated to the interior of the country – the 12 000 persons defending Komárom were prepared to the siege, which commenced in March of 1849 after the blockade of the fortress system. The siege cannons of the beleaguering Austrian army corps – their commandant was lieutenant general Balhasar Simunich – began to shell the fort of Komárom on 20<sup>th</sup> March. Simunich set his heavy siege artillery exactly between the present Fortress of Monostor and Sz?ny. The bombardment tending to quench preferably the defenders and the inhabitants caused smaller damages in the defensive buildings, the dwelling houses and the public buildings sustained a massive injury. The defence in spite of the serial attempts successfully maintained the fortress elements.

The results of the spring military expedition of the main body of the army rendered the crack of the blockade possible. The Hungarian main force of the army succeeded in expelling the Austrian squads in the direction of Gy?r and to be able to rule the right bank of the river Danube the bulwark began there as well.

The new commandant of the fortified castle general Gy?rgy (George) Klapka issued order to build a fort supplied with casemates on the Sand-Hill. In the course of the building the originally four corner-towered, suitable to accommodate 1 000 persons edifice's tower - looking in the direction of ?cs - was completed; the remaining directions were assured by earthworks. The cannons placed in the entrenchment could enfilade the foreground of the N?dor-line and were able to close the Danube as well as the road from the direction of Vienna. Two defence buildings were developed in the road's defence, respectively the entrenchment of Igm?nd protecting from the direction of the encampment.

The Hungarian and the Austrian main body of the army encountered twice in the area in July – without a decisive success. Thereafter the Hungarian main forces were commanded to the river of Tisza, so Klapka with his 18 200 persons army of defence and 300 cannons was prepared for the guard of the town and its system of fortifications. Against the Austrian observational and blocking forces (12 000 persons and 75 cannons) Klapka launched more offensives and during the greatest one he gained ground to Pozsony respectively to Gy?r and obtained grand booty.

After the decisive defeat of the Hungarian main body of the army and the capitulation at Vil?gos on 13<sup>th</sup> August Klapka and Komárom isolated, the fortress system was enclosed with the Austrian and Russian troops. Finally after a long chain of discussions Klapka on 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1849 signed the agreement about the capitulation of the fortress. Komárom was virtually destroyed during the war of independence, the prosperous 20 000 persons town's inhabitants decreased to one half. Majority of churches, schools, public buildings and private houses fell prey to the bombardment.

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