

THE COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAMME CONDUCTED IN 2021–2023 TO RESEARCH THE ATTLA LINE (1944–1945)

VIKTOR KULCSÁR¹ – BALÁZS POLGÁR²

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Community archaeology is an increasingly important activity of museums in Hungary today. Thanks to the work of non-professional volunteers committed to cultural heritage protection, metal detector surveys conducted within the framework of community archaeology programmes allow the effective exploration of extended areas. This paper provides a preliminary summary of the results of a complex multi-institutional research programme on the Attila Line (Budapest, Pest County) of the Second World War. At the same time, this programme also clearly shows how military historical archaeology of modern conflicts, connected with community archaeology, can contribute to the rethinking of the legally regulated chronological limits of Hungarian archaeological research.

Keywords: Attila Line (1944–1945), conflict archaeology, community archaeology, metal detector survey

Conflict archaeology or military archaeology has achieved important results in various places of the world (SUTHERLAND & HOLST 2005; SCOTT & McFEATERS 2011; CARMAN 2013) and has a significant history in Hungary as well. The first Hungarian monograph on the topic is one by military historian Lajos Négyesi (NÉGYESI 2010). A paper about Hungarian archaeological research of early and late modern periods in the latest issue of this journal presented this research direction as an area witnessing the most dynamic evolution in the past decade (LASZLOVSZKY 2023, 41–43). The actuality of the topic is also clearly shown by a recent event, the sixth of the conference series “War, Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Protection”. The initiative started in 2016 and has now developed into one of the most important domestic professional events of the field. The research programme presented in this article was included in the conference programme.

In 2021, the Gödöllő City Museum and the MoD Military History Institute and Museum concluded a cooperation agreement for the archaeological investigation of the Attila Line (1944–1945), completed by archival and cartographic research (for a comprehensive overview of the defence system built in the eastern suburbs of Budapest in the fall of 1944, see RAVASZ 1999; NEVENKIN 2019, 46–53). The tasks and field investigations were planned based on a combination of LiDAR surveys, analysis of aerial photographs, object surveys, and metal detector sur-



Fig. 1. Section of an infantry trench in the area of Bag (Pest County, 2023)

¹ MoD Military History Institute and Museum, Conflict Archaeology Department, e-mail: kulcsar.viktor@mail.militaria.hu

² MoD Military History Institute and Museum, Conflict Archaeology Department, e-mail e-mail: polgar.balazs@mail.militaria.hu



Fig. 2. Section of anti-tank trench from Vácszentlászló (Pest County, 2022)

(IX. 8.) on bomb disposal tasks. Another fundamental concern of fieldwork was the possibility of identifying human remains and military burial places linked to World War II. At this point, it is important to mention that only the Directorate of Military Care and Hero Cult of the MoD Military History Institute and Museum may excavate – with the involvement of a cooperating partner, if necessary – war graves established after the Defence Forces Act of 1868. Obviously, one had to take into account that relics of several historical eras may have been mixed in the research area with time.

In this article, we present the results of several fieldwalks realised within the framework of our community archaeology programme (for a summary of the 2021–2022 campaign, see KULCSÁR, POLGÁR & SOÓS 2022). The first one is related to the research of combat vehicle remains. In November 2021, the professional team of the Gödöllő City Museum and volunteers have identified the wreck site of a Soviet tank north of Mogyoród. We could also track the destruction of the Soviet T-34/76 tank in archival sources: it was destroyed during a German–Hungarian counterattack on 12 December 1944 (SZÁMVÉBER 2018, 375). The largest finds connected to the tank were two *in situ*, large, continuous parts of the track. Besides, several smaller pieces of intact or melted wreckage and the remains of heat-activated machine gun ammunition were also collected (Fig. 3). The findings clearly showed that the tank had been hit and burnt out and the wreckage was later carried away, save for some larger parts of the tracks, which were left behind (KULCSÁR & POLGÁR & SOÓS 2022, 2015–217). Another event may be highlighted: the field observation carried out as part of the metal-detector-aided survey of the earthworks in the Gödöllő area, where we could identify material relics of the battles of 1944 at several points. The pattern of the recovered militaria (primarily ammunition remnants, cartridge cases, grenade shrapnel) indicated high-intensity combat operations. It was possible to

veys. The fieldwork was carried out approximately one day per week, with 2–10 people, at locations around Szada, Fót, Mogyoród, Dány, Gödöllő, Isaszeg, Domony, Bag, Valkó, and Vácszentlászló (Pest County), typically in forest areas. During the archaeological investigation of the Attila Line, both object-centred and event-centred research was carried out: in some cases, the research team tried to assign written and visual sources to the discovered material remains or the military-historical context of the earthworks identified on surface, while in other cases they were looking for traces of a specific military-historical event (cf. NÉGYESI 2008, 180–181) (Figs. 1–2). The most important regulations for fieldwork were determined by Government Decree 68/2018 (IV. 9.) on the rules for the protection of cultural heritage and Government Decree 142/1999



Fig. 3. Bearing housing cover of a Soviet T-34/76 tank from the Mogyoród tank wreck site (Pest County, 2023)



Fig. 4. *En bloc* clips of Mannlicher rifles from the area of the defensive positions near Dány (Pest County, 2021)

recover a large amount of *en bloc* clips of Hungarian small arms from amongst the remains of an entrenchment near Dány (Fig. 4). The clips left behind might indicate that the location may serve as the starting point of a counterattack, where the ammunition was transferred from infantry weapons to machine guns. We also found the remains of several Romanian mortar stabilizer wings manufactured under a French license. Romanian units were deployed in this area during the Battle of Budapest, so these findings are considered unique in the investigation of the Budapest battlefield. In a forest belonging to Máriabesnyő we could locate the firing position or ammunition loading site of the batteries

of the Royal Hungarian 10th Infantry Division: handles and other parts made of iron of a large number of artillery ammunition boxes, scattered in the immediate vicinity of a forest road (LUKÁCS 2020, 128).

SUMMARY

The still discernible sections of the earthworks of the Attila Line include anti-tank trenches, infantry trenches, artillery and machine gun emplacements, and foxholes (Kamen Nevenkin estimated the total length of the anti-tank trenches and infantry trenches of the Attila line as 593 km; NEVENKIN 2019, 52). The typical objects recovered by metal detector surveys (Figs. 5–7) are listed in Table 1. A representative selection of the militaria unearthed during the field walkings was presented in the temporary exhibition ‘Gödöllő a frontvonalban’ (‘Gödöllő in the frontline’) by the Gödöllő City Museum (A KIÁLLÍTOTT TÁRGYAK JEGYZÉKE 2023, 210–212) (Fig. 8). The observations made during field research are ominous: we have revealed abundant traces of illegal metal detector activity, including a relative poverty of finds and plunder pits.

In the future, civil volunteers, local governments, and local museums may act jointly to play a major role in the preservation and further research of the built heritage of the Attila Line.

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Fig. 5. Fork remains from an infantry defensive position in the area of Dány (Pest County, 2022)



Fig. 6. Cartridges of American Browning machine gun ammunition (with the factory mark TW meaning Twin Cities Ordnance Plant, Minnesota) from the area of the defensive positions near Gödöllő (Pest County, 2022)



Fig. 7. Iron tent stakes from an infantry defensive position site in the area of Gödöllő (Pest County, 2023)



Fig. 8. Installation of the temporary exhibition 'Gödöllő in the Frontline' with objects found during the archaeological research of the Attila Line (Gödöllő City Museum, 2023)

Table 1. Characteristic artefacts found during the field research of the Attila Line
(Gödöllő City Museum, MoD Institute of Military History and Museum)

Main find type groups		Main find types
1.	<i>Weapons</i>	grenade fragments remains of artillery fuses mortar shell stabilizer wing grenade fuse caps Katyusha rocket remnants hand grenade remnants tracer ammunition fuse machine gun belts submachine gun magazine remnants stripper clips <i>en bloc</i> clips small arms cases
2.	<i>Clothing memorabilia</i>	clasps buttons iron shoe mounts
3.	<i>Equipment memorabilia</i>	iron tent stakes iron crate mounts crate handles
4.	<i>Utility items</i>	salve jars/tubes bottles tin cans cutlery remnants coins
5.	<i>Personal items</i>	watch remnants lighters cigarette cases knives pipe caps

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