



JÓZSEF KAKUCZI



Museum of Ethnography in Budapest, where the narrative of József Kakuczi was found. Source: <https://neprajz.hu/latogatasok/nyitvatartas.html>

Roma had been serving in the military in the years preceding World War II (see for example Deáky and Nagy 2008).

József Kakuczi was drafted in 1937 and taken to the Count Ortutay military base. Due to discretionary leave, Defence law condemned him to six weeks imprisonment.

In 1939, he finally gave up arms due to

sickness. Yet, in 1940 he was asked to participate in a 30-day long combat practice, only then leaving the army in 1940 as a discharged service-man. Then, in 1942 he once again received a draft call. Aware of the consequences of defying military orders from his previous experience in military service, he nonetheless decided to ignore the call.

By then, Kakuczi knew that his “type of people” [fajta] were victims of the regime and were deported. **Kakuczi was referring to the anti-Roma measures and intensifying persecution of Roma in Hungary.** By then, he was likely aware of the forced labour and internment camps to which many Roma were deported. Conscious of his decision, he wrote: *“I couldn’t be a patriot, only a military fugitive.”*

As a consequence, Kakuczi was **on the run until 1943, helped and supported by two Roma women at the time - Rozália Sárközi and Zsófia Horváth.** Eventually, one day in the early hours in September 1944, a gendarme caught Kakuczi. He was taken to Pestszentlőrinc, where many Roma were rounded up, and then onto Lajosmizse. His attempt to escape from Lajosmizse was nearly successful, but Arrow Cross soldiers caught him and arrested him. On his way to the infamous Komárom camp, he managed to escape once again. On his return to Esztergom, he was caught again, **until the Red Army entered the country, and he was set free.** He was free but traumatised, and shattered so much so he could barely stand on his feet. His eagerness to survive was beyond doubt; however, his life in the 40s was defined by constant struggle and escape.

Later in life, Kakuczi was **employed by the Hungarian Gypsy Cultural Association as a lecturer.** The Hungarian Gypsy Cultural Association was established in 1958 and lasted until 1961. It was one of the first Roma cultural institutions in Hungary that promoted the advancement of Roma and Roma culture, by advocating for cultural rights and through

cooperative efforts with the state to assure improvements in the fields of health, education, housing and employment conditions.

Sources and further information:

1. Primary: Szász, Anna Lujza. 2015. "Memory emancipated: Exploring the memory of the Nazi genocide of Roma in Hungary." Dissertation. Eötvös Lóránd University, Department of Sociology.
2. Secondary: Verhás, Evelin, Angéla Kóczé, and Anna Lujza Szász. 2018. Roma Resistance during the Holocaust and in its Aftermath Collection of Working Papers. Budapest: Tom Lantos Institute.
3. The Hungarian Gypsy Cultural Association "was also a legal forum and offered assistance in legal procedures, cases. Its documentation is deposited in the Museum of Ethnography among which one can find hand-written letters which tell stories and lay complaints about the every-day life of the Roma. The narrative of József Kakuczi was found among those letters. Deposited in the Museum of Ethnography, Mária László inheritance, 5.box" (Verhás, Kóczé and Szász 2018). The "scraps of paper" where Kakuczi wrote his life story is discovered by Anna Lujza Szász when she conducts her research for her PhD dissertation. The Museum of Ethnography has a collection of documents, a section that includes materials from family and individual archives and estates, of which Mária László inheritance is one of the more important sets of documents.

This biography has been written by Katya Dunajeva