

# The Napoleon Series

## The Girl of Kismegyer at the Battle of Raab

By Ferdi Irmfried Wöber

After five hours of heavy fighting, the battle of Raab on June 14 1809 ended with disaster for the combined Austrian army under Archduke John and the inexperienced Hungarian Insurrection under Palatine Joseph. This heroic story of a young Hungarian girl had its beginning in the compound in Kismegyer. Inside this compound was a big granary with two smaller houses, surrounded by a 3 meter stone wall. The Austrian General Colloredo gave orders to have this stronghold repaired to stop the advancing french army under Beauharnais. In the afternoon of June 13 1809 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of Graz Volunteers under Major Hummel with 458 men entered this compound. In one of the two houses in a little room slept a girl not knowing what is all about around her. Her wish was to be near her beloved Stephan Vukosits, a hussar in the 1<sup>st</sup> Hussar Regiment of General Mecsery, who had to save the area in the neighborhood. She missed leaving the compound as the others did.



**The Kismegyer Granary**

In the early afternoon a group of Hungarian hussars passed the compound followed by French cavalry. They were hit by unexpected fire from the Volunteers and got into trouble and lost control. At 1.30 pm the avant guard of the division of General Seras, all in all 8000 men, arrived in front of the compound and immediately opened their attack. From now on the fighting became stronger and stronger, on the other side the casualties increased. The Hungarian girl, whose name was Erszebet (Ertsi) Hatvan, decided to

help the Graz Volunteers as much as she could, since it was too late to leave the compound. At 2.30 pm a short break gave the Volunteers hope for an end of the attack. The open space inside the compound was filled with wounded soldiers. The seriously wounded were carried into the granary with the help of Doctor Wisler and Priest Hagen, as well as Ertsi. Only 30 minutes later the French were replaced by the Italian division of General Severoli. The bombardment became very strong and Ertsi was hit on her shoulder by a splitter of a howitzer shell. For better protection she took the uniform of a dead Volunteer, and from then on there was no difference between her and the other soldiers. At 4.45 pm for the first time the attackers entered the compound and the rest of the not wounded Volunteers, only 103 men, collected themselves in front of the door of the granary for a counter-attack. This failed, so commander Major Hummel began negotiations with General Fontanelli. He guaranteed them protection. They would be brought to empty wine cellars in the village Nyúl, 8 km away from the compound of Kismegyer. At 7 pm as darkness fell they arrived in the cellars where they became prisoners.

Now began the second part of the heroic story of Ertsi which at least saved the lives of the Graz Volunteers.

### **New facts about the Girl of Kismegyer and the Graz Volunteers in Nyúl.**

The story about the Girl was unknown until 2003 to experts in Hungary, because only

documents in German existed in Austria. Nevertheless, the interest of the inhabitants of the town Győr (Raab) and the village of Nyúl in their history is very high.

For the first time I had the opportunity on November 13 to get a look at two wine cellars until now closed. Those cellars are in a distance of few meters and they are still in the same condition since 300 years. Lord Mayor of Nyúl, Mr. Henrik Schmiedt, opened both cellars for a group of visitors. The cellars have a wooden door in the floor. Wooden stairs lead 3 meters down under the earth. Bottles and equipment all around for making wine. The wine cellars are on average between 20 to 25 meters deep. The left one was probably the cellar where Major Hummel and his commanders of the Graz Volunteers were captured during the night of 14 to 15 June 1809. All the peasants had fled and the wine bottles were taken for safety to other places. In front of the cellars there is a bigger open space of about 300 square meters, ideal for more than 100 prisoners to gather together and to be kept under guard. A total of 20 cellars in the area could give room for about 500 prisoners.



The newspaper „Der Wanderer“ in 1845 and *Mailänder Militär-Kalender* in 1846, wrote in similar words:

*The wine cellars had mostly a small entrance room, a so-called front room, with a table and seats, but sometimes also with a cooking place and a bed for the workers of the vineyards to stay over night. A wooden door separated this room from the actual wine cellar.*

**Wine cellars where Major Hummel and Ertsi Hatvan were kept.**

Along the short path of about 80 meters were several wine cellars close to each other. On a steep path on the right there were other wine cellars as well.



**Inside of the Wine Cellars**

*It has already dark as the prisoners, among them was Ertsi in her masculine clothes taken from a dead Graz Volunteer and, under numerous escort, were carried off from the slaughter of their fame in Kismegyer. At 7 o'clock at night they arrived at an empty wine cellar in Nyúl which was surrounded by guards. Here she met with some of the Hungarian insurgents, and also here she met her beloved Stephan Vukosits, a hussar from 1st Hussar Regiment of General Mecsery. The French held the Hungarians as prisoners-of-war. The darkness fell. No*

*one could see clearly what happened. Weary by the exertion of the glorious fighting,*

*exhausted by thirst and hunger, most fell into a convulsive sleep on the damp soil of the wine cellar.*



**View of the Front Room from the Cellar**

The town of Nyúl was occupied by the Italian Guard Infantry Division, which consisted of 2362 men (including 368 officers with 250 horses). While the 1st Brigade under Fontanelli had to guard the prisoners in the wine cellars, the 2nd Brigade under Guerin stayed around the village about two kilometers away.

*In the moonlight, the soldiers walked up and down, and from time to time their „Sentinelle prenez garde“ sounded through the night. With midnight an Italian grenadier captain appeared, accompanied by several soldiers. On the call "Qui vive? Napoleon et Marengo" the slogan of*

*the day was the answer, and the posts presented their rifles. The door to the wine cellar was opened so the prisoners could hear the translator. They delivered the order of Beauharnais from the headquarters in Szabadhegy, which said that they expected death by shooting in the early morning. The officers discussed how they could communicate the judgment to Archduke John, although they were strictly guarded. Ertsi asked if she could do it, because she knew every stone and path and she would be able to pass all the guards in the darkness. She again dressed in her maid's clothes and could easily pass the guard, as they thought she was a resident of a wine-house.*

The Graz Volunteers had to line up in front of both wine cellars, guarded by an Italian escort. They passed the nearby crossroad and after 500 meters they reached the place for execution on the left side of the road.



**Path to Place Where the Volunteers Were to Be Executed**

*Without their weapons, they marched gloomily and inwardly toward the plain in direction to Szabadhegy. Two Grenadier Regiments expected the Volunteers. In front of the battalions of these regiments and on each wing stood officers. Opposite to them, their backs against a freshly raised earth-bank, the prisoners had to stop to await their execution. The captured officers were now separated, they were to die first. In the early morning two Italian battalions (the Grenadier Battalion and the Carabinier Battalion) had already taken their position. The captain succeeded in getting an additional postponement from the executive committee who were waiting for the message from Beauharnais, the commander of the French Army. Beauharnais took his command back. Ertsi Hatvan immediately hurried back to Nyúl to report the joyful decision. After a while, the pelotons swung, and entered the ranks of the regiments. The large number of prisoners, altogether about 500 men, was divided into two groups.*

One group marched under a Bavarian escort to Chalon-sur-Marne in France, the second group, with the commanders of the Graz Volunteers and Ertsi Hatvan were brought to Vienna for further questioning. They were freed near the village Kiszell by an attack by Hungarian troops under General Mesko. Major Hummel could write his report already on June 19 about the last days of the Graz Volunteers and mentioned the brave story of the „Girl of Kismegyér“, although he had forgotten her name.



**The 2002 Ceremony for the Placing of the Plaque**

Ferdi Irmfried Wöber  
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Two years later, a young couple Stephan and Ertsi, could start her new life in a rebuilt house near the granary of Kismegyér. Every year festivities were held at the granary and their three children could listen proudly to her parents.

In 2003 a memorial plaque was placed on the edge of a little square in the center of the wine cellars to help visitors remember what happened in 1809.