

Establishment of the Hungarian Air Force and the Activity of the Hungarian Royal "Honvéd" Air Force in World War II Respectively

Szabó Miklós

Major-General (Ret.). Correspondent Member of Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Resumo

O artigo de Szabó Miklós traça uma panorâmica da Força Aérea da Hungria desde os tempos da monarquia dual, durante a Grande Guerra, até ao seu fim trágico em 4 de Maio de 1945, quando os responsáveis dessa mesma Força Aérea decidiram pôr fim à sua participação no Conflito incendiando as suas próprias aeronaves. O ponto de incidência do autor refere-se às operações desenvolvidas pela Força Aérea Húngara durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial, na Frente Leste, em colaboração com a Luftwaffe.

Abstract

The article of Szabó Miklós traces a panoramic of the Hungarian Air Force since the time of the dual monarchy, during the Great War, until its tragic end in May 4th 1945, when responsible of this Air Force had decided to end its participation in the Conflict by setting on fire their own aircrafts. The point of incidence of the author is related to the operations developed by the Hungarian Air Force during the Second World War, in the East Front, in collaboration with the Luftwaffe.

1. Historical Antecedents

The Hungarian Air Force was rooted in the history of the so-called "Air Walking" Teams of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, an organization that began its activities with thirteen air squadrons in World War I. Flight Lieutenant István Petróczy, "field pilot," took the lion's share in training the air force pilots of these units. There were several Hungarian pilots among them and at least three² of the most successful ten pilots were Hungarian. The so-called "Háry Circus," the fighter squadron of Flight Lieutenant and later Air Force Commander László Háry, achieved great fame.

The Peace Treaty of Trianon made impossible the further development of this promising beginning, as Hungary finished World War I on the side of the defeated and regulation of this treaty seemed more severe to the Hungarians than the Versailles Treaty referring to the Germans. The Trianon Dictate signed on 4 June 1920 essentially was nothing else than the continuation of war with the means of peace"³.

In fact, one element of this peace system, the Peace Treaty of Trianon forced unusually severe conditions on Hungary. Because of the Treaty, Hungary lost 67,3% of its territory and 58,4% of its population⁴. This highly significant loss was made worse by the fact that this dictate referring to the Hungarians did not take into consideration the previously so often mentioned (by president Wilson) national policy, when with 7,5 million members of different nations separated, more than 3 million Hungarians become minorities⁵. In addition, more than the half of the aforementioned population lived in closed ethnic groups, along the Hungarian borders.

Economic consequences were similarly very severe, as disintegration of former state structure fundamentally changed the economic structure of the country. Though the majority of factories and 51,2% of industrial workers remained within the new borders of the country and with this, the economic structure became more up-to-date,

1 Sándor Nagyvárad, Miklós M. Szabó and László Winkler, *Fejezetek a magyar katonai repülés történetéből* (Chapters of the History of Hungarian Military Aeronautics) (Budapest, 1986), p. 32.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

3 Gyula Hajdú, *Diplomáciai és nemzetközi jogi lexicon* (Diplomacy and international legal encyclopedia) (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1967) p. 827.

4 Területi, népességi és gazdasági változások Magyarországon 1920 (Territorial, Demographic and Economical Changes in Hungary in 1920) *História*, 1984/4-5. vol. 4-5 p. 51.

5 Magyarország története (History of Hungary) 1918-1919, 1919-1942. (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1976. vol. 8th, p. 363.

but it could not be used, as the country nearly completely lost its source of raw materials. As a consequence of this peace dictate, the former economic unity became disintegrated and it could not be recovered.

The military regulations were not light either. Compulsory military service was banned, declaring that “the Hungarian Armed Forces could be established and completed on a volunteer basis”⁶. Within the permitted 35000 troop strength limit the officer strength could be one twentieth (1750 people) and the NCO strength could be one fifteenth (2333 people). It was regulated that for each one thousand soldiers could have 1150 rifles or guns (with 500 rounds of ammunition each), 15 machine-guns (10.000 rounds of ammunition each), 2 mortars (with 1.000 light and 500 medium grenades), and 3 cannons or howitzer (with 1.000 ammunitions each). At the same time the use of cannons of more than 105 mm caliber was forbidden⁷.

It was determined that “the Hungarian Armed Forces could not have military or naval air service”⁸. According to this regulation all aircraft and airships - including those ones which were under production, assembling or repairing - should have been handing over to the Allied and Associated Powers. As a consequence the country became totally defenceless.

The Peace Treaty of Trianon forbade the creation of a Hungarian Air Force. Although preparatory regulations to get around these decrees had been initiated earlier, the Entente’s Aviation Supervisory Committee was more successful in this cat-and-mouse game during the first half of the 1920s.

Yet the foundation for the future Hungarian Air Force was continuously being laid. The 1932 idea that a future air force consisting of 48 squadrons should soon be developed was decisive⁹. This ambition was very successfully supported by “theoretical” aeronautical activities in Hungary in the 1930s. In fact, it was so successful that, in March 1935, the Director of the Aviation Office, commander of the hidden air force,

6 Miklós M. Szabó A Magyar Királyi Honvéd Légierő (The Hungarian Royal Honvéd Air Force) 1938 - 1945 (Zrínyi Kiadó, 1999) p. 7.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 Hadtörténelmi Levéltár (Archive of Military History), Honvédelmi Minisztérium Elnöki (Ministry of Defense, Presidential) (hereafter cited as HL HM Eln.), VI. 1/ - 1932/9135. Hr.

"set the goal that we become a serious opponent towards at least one of the surrounding Little Entente states"¹⁰. On October 1, 1937, this ambition had reached the point where six fighter planes, eight day bombers, two night bombers, and two remote reconnaissance squadrons - and altogether 192 airplanes - made up the "secret" Hungarian Air Force¹¹.

2. Breaking out from the Trianon bonds, the first "Wing-beats". (1938-41)

On August 22, 1938, in Bled, Yugoslavia, Hungary and the Little Entente signed a pledge of mutual non-aggression and also recognized Hungary's equal right to arm itself.

However, an optimal and open development of the Hungarian Royal Air Force was not still quite possible, due to a power struggle among the country's highest-ranking military leaders over who would command the air force, and also due to the First Vienna Award. The latter produced the military instruction of October 6, 1938¹², which commanded that the airplane units, except for two near reconnaissance squadrons, occupy their military airports and come to a level of readiness for deployment. However, the airplane units never did come to deployment readiness at this time.

Regent Miklós Horthy's decision of January 1, 1939, to make the air force an independent military branch was of historical significance¹³, and indeed an independent Air Force was soon organized. Although the occupation of Sub-Carpathia did not require the deployment of Hungarian planes, a few days later the Slovak Air Force moved to strike the Ungvár airport of the 1st Fighter Squadron. In the air battle over Szobránc and Ungvár on March 24, 1939, the pilots of the 1st Fighter Squadron shot down nine Slovak airplanes without incurring any losses themselves¹⁴.

However, new territorial revisionist goals did not leave much time for a peaceful development of the Air Force. The ever-increasing tension between Romania and Hungary brought into being the 1st Air Brigade on June 6, 1940¹⁵, and its six fighter squadrons, six light bomber squadrons, and four heavy bomber squadrons took up

10 HL HM Eln. 1.a. - 1935/105154.

11 Ibid., 1937/10000.

12 HL 1st Army Corps operation I, 1938/381006.

13 HL HM Elnökség (Presidency) A. - 1938/93512.

14 István Farkas, *A levegő titánjai* (The Titans of the Air) (Budapest, xxxx), pp. 52-53.

15 HL Repülőalakulatok (Flight Formations) (hereafter cited as RA), 39. doboz, 1.sz. dandárparancsnoksági parancs (39th Box, No. 1. command of the Air Brigade Command).

positions in the eastern part of Hungary¹⁶. Fate was gracious to them and the Second Vienna Award made a peaceful settlement possible once again. The situation was different a few months later in a military operation against Yugoslavia, which not only inaugurated Hungary as a belligerent party but also dealt the new Hungarian Air Force its first and devastating tragedy. The crash of the parachutist command plane, deployed from Veszprém-Jutas airport, shortly after takeoff, took 20 lives¹⁷. This is astounding even if we consider that the six fighter squadrons and three bomber squadrons of the 1st Air Brigade in the southern region did not experience any serious losses¹⁸. However, the drama of the parachutist command plane was only an overture to the misery of coming war.

3. Air operations in Ukraine (1941-1943)

At the request of Germany, Infantry General Henrik Werth, Chief of Staff of the Honvéd Army, mobilized the land units of northeastern Hungary on June 14, 1941¹⁹. Although no documents are available, the same measure must have been taken by the Hungarian Air Force as well, since in a few days' time some of the fighter squadrons were standing by at the military airports of Miskolc and Huszt. Obviously, this was what made it possible, in a few hours after the bombing of Kassa (June 26, 1941), for a bomber unit to be moved from Transdanubia to the Debrecen region in order to stand by for the following day's task and for remote reconnaissance planes to begin to search relevant areas. Thus they were ready to retaliate for the Kassa bombing. Hungarian near reconnaissance, bomber, and fighter planes hit Soviet military targets along the border, on Stanislav in the morning of June 27, and on Strij two days later²⁰. These events were all that occurred during the Hungarian retaliation, and the strategic application of the air force ended with them.

16 See Air Force Staff Major János Németh's 1940 journal of military operations (its verified copy is in the possession of the author), for a note made on July 8.

17 See the April 13, 1941, obituary of the Hungarian Royal Parachutist Squadron (in the possession of the author) and also the April 27, 1941, copy of the daily, *Pápa és Vidéke*.

18 HL Vezérkarfőnökség (Chiefs of Staff of the Supreme Command) (hereafter cited as Vkf.) Elnökség, 1941/5161/7, Appendix 1.

19 Ignác Ölvedi, "A Honvéd Vezérkar és a kassai 'casus belli,' II" (The Honvéd Chiefs of Staff and the 'casus belli' of Kassa, II), *Honvédelem* 10 (1981): 110.

20 HL Vkf. Elnökség 1, 1941/5615 and HL Vkf. Elnökség 1. Daily reports, 1941/21-23, and 38. fol.

The so-called Kárpát Group, with the Rapid Corps being its strength, began its eastward advance during the last days of June 1941. An airplane group, including near reconnaissance, fighter, and bomber squadrons, undertook to give them support. The flying units were frequently rotated during the following months so that as many of the basic units as possible would acquire some military experience.

When the land forces left the Carpathians, the air force command was compelled to move its fighter units to Ukrainian airports as soon as possible, in order to keep up the continuous support of the army, as well as due to the dangers involved in flying over the ring of the Carpathians several times daily. Thus, on July 12, they took possession of Kolomia airport²¹, which was followed by settling in at the airports of Jezierzany, Bar, Sutiski, and Annopol. Both the near and remote reconnaissance planes delivered valuable data to the air force and land units, the bomber planes assisted the Rapid Corps in gaining ground, and the fighter planes safeguarded the air and land units while trying to achieve local superiority in the air.

The "migration" continued along a giant "crescent" on the east and the airplanes soon got acquainted with the airports of Bersagy, Voznesensk, Krivoj Rog, and Kazanka. On August 31 the Rapid Corps took over the defense of the River Dnieper at about 200 km south of Dniepropetrovsk, while the planes were busy in the airspace over Lozovaja, Izjum, and Kharkov. The worsening weather and difficult terrain hindered the activities of both the land forces and air forces, and therefore they had returned to Hungary by mid-December 1941²².

Although the Rapid Corps and its flying units worked along strategic side tracks of the Eastern Front, this was a period to gain experience and, according to documents of the general staff and articles published in professional military papers, they lived up to expectations. During this half year of war time experience, the flying units made 1,454 flights, spent 2,192 hours in the air, dropped 217 tons of bombs, and shot down 30 Soviet planes. At the same time 17 Hungarian officers and 15 airmen died, 4 officers and 2 airmen went missing, and 10 officers and 18 airmen were wounded. The airforce lost 25 reconnaissance planes, 14 fighters, 11 bombers, 5 couriers, and 1 transport plane²³.

Hardly had the Hungarian flyers recovered and begun to process their experience when they had to face new challenges. At Germany's request and due to the deteriorating

21 László Tomor, *Harcok az orosz égen* (Fighting on the Russian Sky) (Budapest, 1942), p. 14.

22 Copy of the 1/3 Fighter Squadron's WAR JOURNAL, July 20 - November 26, 1941 (in the possession of the author).

23 HL. Vkf. Elnökség 1. - 1942/4338. Part C.

military situation, the 2nd Hungarian Army had to be deployed to Ukraine in April 1942. Although at that point the Germans did not request that a flying unit accompany and support the army, modern strategic principles made it indispensable. This was how the 1st Flying Group, with one remote and one near reconnaissance squadron, two fighter squadrons, and one bomber squadron, became part of the strength of the 2nd Army²⁴.

The remote reconnaissance planes were the first to arrive (on June 12) at Amasovka, 30 km south of Kursk, and flew out from there to spot and take photos of the region around Zchigiri, Kastornioie, Voronezh, Ostrogozhsk, and Volokonovka. Ten days later, 12 near reconnaissance planes also moved to Amasovka. On June 23, the bomber squadron took possession of Konotop and shortly began to destroy the Tim region fortifications. On July 2, the fighter squadron of Szolnok also landed at the airport of Konotop and included among its pilots Vice-Regent István Horthy, Reserve First Lieutenant of the Hungarian Air Force²⁵.

Following the fall of Tim, the road to the River Don was open and the Hungarians reached it on July 10. Already on July 6 the advance made it necessary for two near reconnaissance units to fly to Slasovaia and the fighter squadron to fly to the airport called "West" at Stari Oskol²⁶.

The land forces reaching the Don faced new ordeals as the period of the "bridgehead battles," which included a great sacrifice of men, began. The airplanes also had to support these struggles by the land forces. On July 22, the decision was made that the reconnaissance and fighter squadrons be moved to Ilovskoie and the bombers to Stari Oskol. With regard to future fighting activities, the arrival of another fighter squadron in Ilovskoie on July 30 was an important event²⁷.

24 János Németh, A m. kir. 1. repülőcsoport hadműveleti naplója (1942. VI. 22 - VIII. 24.) (The Hungarian Royal 1st Flying Group's Military Operational Journal: June 22-August 24, 1942) (hereafter cited as J. Németh) (Its certified copy is in the possession of the author), 1st and 2nd Appendices.

25 János A. Péterdi, A volt m. kir. 1. honvéd önálló távolfelderítő repülőosztály vázlatos története (The Sketchy History of the Former Hungarian Royal 1st Honvéd Independent Reconnaissance Flying Battalion) (Kanadai Magyar Szárnyak, Oshawa, Canada, 1978/7) (hereafter cited as KMSz), p. 64; János A. Péterdi's notes, KMSz, 1988/17, p. 34; Gyula Gaál, Vadászidény Uriv felett (Hunting Season Above Uriv), KMSz, 1982/11, p. 51; J. Németh, notes on June 22 and 23 and August 2; Air Force Major István Mocsáry's private journal (its certified copy is in the possession of the author), notes on June 22 and 24; and Magyar Szárnyak 1942/10, p. 20.

26 Imre Füzi, "A 2. magyar hadsereg felvonulása és megsemmisülése a Donnál" (The Deployment and the Annihilation of the 2nd Hungarian Army at the Don) (Honvédelem, 1983/1), p. 113; and J. Németh, notes on July 6 and 14.

27 J. Németh, notes on July 22 and 30.

Even within the context of the raging bridgehead battles, the third week of August was especially tragic for the Don flyers. The overture to the sad series of events occurred on August 14, when the command plane of the bomber unit deployed against the bridge of Uriv was hit by anti-aircraft fire and tumbled down in flames, killing the popular commander of the bomber squad Major István Mocsáry as well as Sergeant Zoltán Nagy and Lance Sergeant Imre Piri. Miraculously, Air Force Staff Lieutenant Colonel János Németh, Chief of Staff of the 1st Flying Group, managed to jump out of the burning plane and survive with only a broken leg, while First Lieutenant György Orbán survived the catastrophe unharmed. This tragedy on August 20 shook the entire country. This was also the day, in the early hours, when Vice-Regent István Horthy was killed²⁸.

The past six decades have not revealed any satisfying explanations about Horthy's death. Different interested groups have produced different explanations. But according to the most realistic theory, the following must have happened: Horthy was not gradually, as he should have been, transferred to the new type of plane he was flying. Thus, he had not learned to counterbalance the plane's faults at high altitudes. Furthermore, he was not of the ideal age or of adequate experience for fighter pilot service in any case.

Yet the war, and therefore the bridgehead battles, continued, with the ongoing support of the 1st Flying Group. Negotiations were also continuing with the Germans on September 23 about how many Hungarian pilots would be retrained on site to fly the more modern Me-109, He-111, Ju-87, and Ju-88 airplanes. As a result, on October 7 a bomber squad began its training to fly the Heinkel He-111 in Poltava, while a few fighter pilots began to be acquainted with the Messerschmitt Me-109 in Stari Oskol²⁹. The near reconnaissance fighters were luckier. According to the command of October 25, they "ended their operations due to the deterioration of the planes of the Hungarian Royal Air Force Squadron"³⁰ and prepared to move back to Hungary. The bomber squadron's happiness in landing in Debrecen by mid-November was tainted by the tragedy that occurred during their last deployment on October 31, when one of their planes was

28 Ibid., note on August 14; Ferenc Mónos, *Boszorkányszállítás (Witch Lodging)* (Budapest, 1942), p. 125; and 2. HDS. pság, Appendix to the Journal, 1942/625 and 647.

29 Staff Lieutenant Colonel Sándor András's war journal between 9/2 and 10/16/1942 (in the possession of the author), note on September 23; and Tihámér Ghyczy, *Az első hazatérés (The First Return Home)* (hereafter cited as *The First Return*, KMSz, 1980/9, p. 12.

30 HL 2. HDS. Pság, Appendix to the Journal, 1942/1211.

hit and exploded, killing everybody on board. During the four months the bomber squadron spent at the operational area, they executed 265 bombing runs during 1,062 flights, dropped 1,700 tons of bombs, and lost 11 people³¹. Those who remained at the front hoped that their time was also coming to go home, and did not realise that the beginning of a bitter end was approaching.

While the Battle of Stalingrad was still roaring on, the annihilation of the 2nd Hungarian Army had begun as well. The offensive launched on January 12, 1943, hurled the 2nd Flying Brigade into a disastrous situation. The retraining sessions, the unsuitable weather conditions for flying at all, and the freezing of the “Héja” planes all minimized activities in the air. However, defending and holding onto the so-called Ilovskoie all-around defense district was the 2nd Flying Brigade’s task. Consequently, in the second half of January both the flying crews and the land staff mostly worked on land fortification. Then they were encircled by the enemy, fought and broke out, then again were encircled, broke out and retreated. Or else they died, like Staff Commander of the brigade Staff Lieutenant Colonel of the Air Force Kálmán Csukás³². Although every death is irremediable, the relatively low number of losses for the 2nd Flying Brigade is surprising, especially if the fact that they did not practice their “profession” is considered. According to the statistics of March 9, 1943, 36 men were killed, 46 were missing, 7 were ill, 56 were wounded, 32 had frostbite, and 36 planes were lost³³. These relatively low numbers should, by all means, be attributed to the leadership qualities of Staff Major of the Air Force Miklós Balássy. He was the battalion training leader and, based on experience gained in 1941, ordered that, once a month, half-day training sessions, involving maneuvers frequently occurring under war circumstances, should be practiced: airport defense, fighting against tanks and parachutists, securing land marches, and so on. Many flyers who were “mortally offended” in 1941–1942 but were saved in 1943, began to hold Balássy’s name in the high esteem which lasted until his death in 1991.

After long delays the decision was made for the remnants of the 2nd Hungarian Army to return to Hungary. However, this did not apply to the 2nd Flying Brigade with a crew retrained to fly modern types of airplanes. The Germans first assigned the airport at Konotop and later at Umany to the 2nd Brigade. Eventually, the Hungarian bombers were trained to fly Junkers Ju-88’s, not He-111’s and not in Ukraine, but

31 The First Return, pp. 12-13.

32 Gyula Gaál, Ilovskoje, KMSz, 1979/8, p. 33.

33 HL 2. HDS. Pság. I. a. 1943/609, 16. fol.

in the south of France. The remote reconnaissance flyers also received more and more of these types of planes, but only in operational areas.

During the temporary success of Operation "Citadella," the Hungarian units assigned to German squadrons again moved further east. Then during the period of a counter-attack and a general attack of the Red Army against Kursk, they retreated west for good. The magnitude of the enormous retreat can be well demonstrated by the "end-stations" of the 1st Air-Carrier Squadron: Kharkov in August, Kiev in September, Zhitomir in early October, Bobruisk in late October, and Pinsk in November. By the summer of 1943, the 1st Air Carrier Squadron had flown about 700,000 km, delivering 200 tons of mail, 100 tons of military equipment, 10 tons of health care materials, 800 injured soldiers, and 1,700 passengers. On September 4 the fighter planes also moved from Kharkov to Poltava. On October 5, 1943, the 2nd Airborne Brigade was renamed the 102nd Airborne Brigade and every deployed air force unit was placed under its command³⁴.

The approaching winter and inclement weather conditions increasingly limited flying activities. The squadrons were renumbered several times which makes it difficult to make the "annual summary." Therefore, the end-of-the-year numbers are considered here. According to certain summaries³⁵, the following data characterize the 1943 activities of individual sub-units:

- The 5/I Fighter Battalion accomplished 1,560 deployments between May and October, with the fighter bombers dropping 39 tons of bombs and winning 69 air battles (according to certain data) while losing 9 pilots.
- In September the remote reconnaissance planes had completed 600-650 deployments and had achieved their 24th victory.
- The 3/1 near reconnaissance squadron did 1,100 deployments and lost 2 planes between May 22 and December.

34 Gyula Gaál, Szárnyas szállítók (Carriers with Wings), KMSz, 1981/10, p. 6; László Winkler, A Bf. 109 vadászgép magyar használatban (The Bf. 109 Fighter Plane in Hungarian Use) (Manual), p. 3; and HL 2. HDS. Pság, 1943/1777, and HL Vkf. Elnökség 1, 1943/6191.

35 Gyula Gaál and Ernő Vági, A magyar királyi légierők harcai Szovjet-Oroszországban a II. világháborúban. Magyarország honvédelme a II. világháború előtt és alatt, 1920-1945 (The Battles of the Hungarian Royal Air Force in Soviet-Russia during World War II. Hungary's National Defense Before and During World War II, 1920-1945), ed. Lajos Veress Dálnoki (Munich, 1972), pp. 241-242; and Bíráló M. Szabó Miklós, "A magyar királyi honvéd légierő a második világháborúban (Criticism Concerning Miklós M. Szabó's "The Hungarian Royal Honvéd Air Force in World War II"), KMSz, 1988/17, pp. 32-35.

- By the end of the year, the number of deployments accomplished by the 102/1 and 102/2 dive-bomber squadrons was over 1,000 each.

However, the new Commander of the 102nd Airborne Brigade, Staff Major Aladár Szirmay, had only four fighting squadrons at his disposal by the end of 1943, with the word “disposal” used only figuratively. As Air Force Staff Major Miklós Balássy, Chief of Air Force Brigade Staff between October 15, 1943, and March 21, 1944, said, “The subordination of air force squadrons was totally nominal and was purely limited to the replacement of personnel and Hungarian financial resources. The squadrons received their deployment commands *directly* from the Germans. We were informed only later and, in several instances, a day later”³⁶. The Air Force Brigade Command retreated to Zhitomir in October 1943, to Lvov (Lemberg) at the end of October and early November, and to Poland in 1944. Then after several months of deadly fighting, they retreated back to Hungary to join in defending their homeland, the original intended purpose for the airforce.

4. Air combats in “the Hungarian Sky” (1944-1945)

This was the battle cry of newly inaugurated professional Hungarian officers after they first pulled out their swords from the sheath. Although tens of thousands of innocent lives were lost to this slogan by the spring of 1944, it was only at this point in time that this beautiful military offering held real meaning.

With the German occupation of March 19, 1944, Hungary almost completely lost its independence and with it began the final deterioration of its Honvéd army and its air force. On April 4, 1944, Marshal of the Reich Göring appointed the Air Force Attaché in Budapest, General Fütterer, as the Commanding General of the German Air Force in Hungary. The regulation indicated that Fütterer dispose “of the organization of the Hungarian Air Force, of its uses, and therefore of its land resources, including those being developed, of the bases and buildings of Hungarian Air Force units, of the Hungarian anti-aircraft artillery, and of all the equipment of above mentioned establishments. Thus, with regard to their deployment, all the units of the

36 Staff Air Force Major Miklós Balássy’s statement (in the possession of the author).

Hungarian Air Force and Anti-Aircraft units shall be or are under the German Air Force Command"³⁷.

With this and with other regulations, it became clear that Hungary could not follow the Italian example of abandoning Germany, and, therefore that the Western powers would also approach the "Hungarian question" differently. Moreover, the only assistance of the Western powers to their ferociously advancing Soviet ally was to destroy Germany's and its partners' military-industrial potential, their crude oil reserves and oil refineries, and the main traffic junction points in order to hinder the shifting of significant military strengths from the west to the east. As a result of all these and other factors, Hungary's airspace became a battlefield and so began the Hungarian Royal Air Force's patriotic war.

Air Force units in Hungary did not have much to do in the first months of 1944, although starting in the autumn of 1943 the possibility that the country would be bombed emerged as a real danger. The 2/1 Fighter Squadron, under the command of Air Force Flight Lieutenant Miklós Scholtz, executed 23 missions in January and 12 flights in February from Ferihegy Airport. This sub-unit provided concrete air defense, beginning on March 10, 1944. The Messerschmitt Me-210 destroyer squadron of the Aeronautical Institute and the 5/1 Night Fighter Squadron was at the disposal of the Honvéd air defense beginning March 17 and was also based at Ferihegy Airport³⁸.

During the coming months these sub-units were to battle about 1,600 airplanes of the 15th U.S. Airborne Army. On March 17, 11 airplanes of the 2/1 Fighter Squadron had to brave 68 B-24 *Liberators* over the northeastern part of Lake Balaton. The Hungarian fighters were not experienced in fighting against the closed firing system of such huge units, and so lost two of their pilots³⁹.

On April 1 the 1/1 Szolnok Fighter Squadron was also included in the home defense⁴⁰. All these, however, were a drop in the ocean, since, with Allied bombing executed by hundreds of airplanes becoming a regular event, the Hungarian fighter force was dwarfed in numbers.

37 György Ránki, Ervin Pamlényi, Lóránt Tilkovszky, and Gyula Juhász, eds., *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország* (The Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary) (Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968), p. 811.

38 HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk. 45. I: 14. Appendices 1 and 2; HL Vkf. Elnökség 1. - 1942/5598; Norbert Csanádi, Sándor Nagyvárad, and László Winkler, *A magyar repülés története* (The History of Hungarian Flying) (Budapest, 1977) (hereafter cited as *Hungarian Flying*), p. 238; and statements by József Vasvári (in the possession of the author).

39 J. R. Gaál, "The Bombs of April" (*Air Combat*, September 1979) and HL RA 100/M.kr.v.rep.e.pk.45.I/14, Appendix 2; and *Hungarian Flying*, p. 242.

40 HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14.

Budapest suffered its first serious bombing run on April 3, when 450 bombers, protected by 137 fighters, struck the Szigetszentmiklós plant of the *Dunai Repülőgépgyár* (Danube Airplane Factory) and the Ferencváros Transfer Railway Station, killing 1,073 and wounding 526 more. On April 12, 54 Wellingtons of the British Royal Air Force bombed the oil plant in Budapest and Mohács. The following day American units attacked Ferihegy, Bánhida, and the *Magyar Waggon - és Gépgyár* (Hungarian Wagon and Machine Factory), producer of Me-109s, in Győr and its airport, killing 564 people and wounding 1,132 more. The Air Force Command deployed all its deployable airplanes against the “armada” and thus about 50–60 Hungarian fighters faced the enormous squadron. In the early hours of April 17, South Pest suffered severe damage⁴¹.

As the above description shows, in April 1944 the Hungarian Air Force drifted into a very serious situation. During one month the 1/1 and 2/1 Fighter Squadrons executed 114 flights, while their 6 bomber planes were shot down, one man was wounded, and three died⁴². (These data and the data used later in this chapter are from the 1944 summary annual report of the squadron’s commander and, from time to time, depart from other researchers’ data.)

On May 1, the 101st Fighter Battalion in Veszprém was formed. It was created from the 2/1, 1/1, and 5/3 Fighter Squadrons, under the command of Air Force Major Aladár Heppes. This unit served under the Hungarian Air Defense Command until September 25. During this period of time they were deployed against only American and British formations⁴³.

On May 4, the Plate Metal Factory of Budapest suffered great damage, with six people killed and 31 wounded. The fighters managed to force the Allied 11th attacking column to turn back. The 101st Fighter Battalion performed its first deployment on May 24. The 13 Hungarian fighter planes, cooperating with the 8th German Fighter Battalion, took up the fight against 300 enemy planes. The monthly statement of the 101st Battalion indicates 45 plane deployments, with one man dead and three injured, while they shot down one fighter and four bomber planes⁴⁴.

41 HL RA - 63.sz. Air Force confidential command, September 23, 1944. (43.doboz, 2.csomó); HL Vkf. Elnökség 1. Information (Tájékoztató) April 12, 13, and 15-17 April 1944; Hungarian Flying, pp. 242-244; Iván Pataky, László Rozsos, and Gyula Sárhidai, *Légi háború Magyarország felett, I* (Air Battle over Hungary) (Zrínyi Kiadó, 1992) (hereafter cited as *Air Battle Over Hungary*), pp. 133-134 and 139; and József Vasváry’s and Károly Faludy’s statements (in the possession of the author.)

42 HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14. Appendix 2.

43 HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14.

44 HL Vkf. Elnökség 1. Tájékoztató (Information) on May 5, 11, and 24 1944; HL RA - 63.sz. Confidential command for the Air Force on September 23, 1944; *Magyar Szárnyak 1944/9.sz.*, p. 6; Csaba D. Veress,

On June 2, 600 planes attacked the region east of the River Tisza under the personal command of General I. C. Eaker, Commander of the Mediterranean Allied Military Air Force. Szeged was heavily hit, the railway station of Szolnok was paralyzed for several days, and the attack against Miskolc took a toll of 72 deaths, 170 people wounded, and 170 buildings damaged. Debrecen took the greatest toll, with 227 tons of bombs falling on the railroad station and vicinity, taking 449 lives. Attacks were also waged against Nagyvárád and Kolozsvár, where 220 deaths and 140 injuries were listed as a result of the air raids⁴⁵.

For several days in mid-June, the Hungarian oil targets - the Budapest, Szőny, and Pétfürdő oil refineries and depots - and the oil tanker train stationed in the Kecskemét railway station were very successfully attacked. In the last days of the month, the Budapest industrial sites were again bombed. As it turns out from the reports, June was the most critical month of the year. In 14 out of a total of 196 flights, the 101st Fighter Battalion achieved its greatest air victories of the year by shooting down 31 fighters and 14 bombers, but it also sacrificed the most, with 10 dead and 2 injured⁴⁶.

July began with a strong Allied attack as well. On July 1, the mining of the River Danube continued, and the following day about 900 airplanes performed the largest attack against Budapest so far. Carpet bombings devastated the city between the Keleti (Eastern) and Nyugati (Western) Railway Stations, but this was also the point when the 18 Hungarian and 180 German fighter planes, as well as the city's anti-air artillery, caused the greatest losses to the enemy. On July 3, 300 airplanes attacked Arad and the Tisza Bridge at Szeged. July 8 was a tragic day, when about 60 Allied airplanes, on their way back from bombing the Vienna Basin, dropped 900 15-kg fragmentation bombs on the airport of the fighter battalion. As a result, 62 people died and 127 were injured. Six days later, there were again attacks against the "oil industry targets," at Hajmáskér, Balatonfüzfő, and Pestszenterzsébet. Twice in the last days of

"Veszprém megye és a Szövetséges Hatalmak stratégiai légitámadásai a második világháborúban" (Strategic Air Raids by Veszprém County and the Allies in World War II) (Veszprém megyei Múzeumok Közleményei, 1981) (hereafter cited as "Veszprém County"), p. 183; Hungarian Flying, p. 245; and HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14. Appendix 2.

45 HL Vkf. Elnökség 1. Tájékoztató (Information) on June 2, 1944; Hungarian Flying, p. 246; József Borus, A szolnoki pályaudvar bombázása 1944. június 2-án (The Bombing of the Szolnok Railway Station on June 2, 1944) (Jászkunság, 1984), p. 76; HL RA - 63.sz. Confidential Command for the Air Force on September 23, 1944; J. R. Gaál, Summer of the Puma (Air Combat, May 1975); and József Vasváry's statement.

46 HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14. Appendix 2.

July Budapest sustained major blows. During July, the 101st Fighter Battalion destroyed 12 fighters and 26 bomber planes in 19 separate air battles involving 196 flights, while it lost 4 pilots⁴⁷. The new tactics paid off: "Achieve an air victory and then disappear or you are lost!"

On August 9, the Allies attacked Pestszentlőrinc, Ferihegy, Almásfüzitő, and Győr. In Győr 24 people died and 5 were injured. In the last third of August, the following settlements sustained air raids: Budapest, Hajdúböszörmény and surrounding area, Szombathely, Szőny, Miskolc, Görömböly-Tapolca, Szolnok, Szeged, Szabadka, Kecskemét, Nagyvárad, Cegléd, and Albertirsa. During this month the Hungarian fighters in Veszprém participated in 121 flight deployments, shot down 4 fighters and 12 bombers, and also lost 4 pilots themselves⁴⁸.

In the first days of September, there were several attempts, using several hundred bombs, by the Allies to destroy the Szeged and Szolnok railroad bridges, and they finally succeeded on September 3 and 5. On September 12 Budapest again sustained a 2,000-ton bombing attack, with Diósgyőr hit the same day. Debrecen experienced its third - and last - American air raid on September 15, killing 260 people. As if the continuous Anglo-American pressure was not enough, on September 14 and 15 the Soviet long-distance air force also "made its mark" on the Budapest-area airports by destroying or damaging about 200 airplanes. The Soviets continued these activities against Csap, Szeged, Debrecen, and Székesfehérvár on September 16 and also between September 19 and 21. The *Weiss Manfréd Művek* (Manfred Weiss Plant) and the *Rákosrendező Pályaudvar* (Rákosrendező Transfer Railway Station) were attacked once again on September 17. The British Royal Air Force waged the 25th air raid against Budapest on September 19⁴⁹.

In the last third of September, both the Hungarian Air Force and the 102nd Air Force Brigade were forced to stay within Hungary by the power of the 1,100 airplanes of the 5th Air Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front⁵⁰.

47 HL Vkf. Elnökség. 1. Tájékoztató (Information) on July 2, 8, and 14 1944; Hungarian Flying, pp. 248 and 250; "Veszprém County," pp. 188-190; HL RA - 63.sz. Confidential Command for the Air Force on September 23, 1944; and HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14. Appendix 2.

48 HL Vkf. Elnökség. 1. Tájékoztató (Information) on August 9, 1944; HL HM Elnökség 17.r. - 1944/211064; Hungarian Flying, p. 252; Air Battle Over Hungary, II, p. 154; and HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14. Appendix 2.

49 Hungarian Flying, pp. 253-254 and 267, and J. R. Gaál, "No Frontline in the Sky" (Air Combat, March 1976).

50 A második világháború története 1939-1945, IX (The History of World War II, 1939-1945, vol. IX.) (Budapest, 1980), p. 267.

Interestingly enough, and in spite of the strong American and increasing Soviet pressure, the 101st Fighter Battalion participated in only one deployment during the whole month of September. They were probably trying to concentrate all their energy on establishing the 101st Hungarian Fighter Regiment⁵¹.

On October 5, the Anglo-American forces continued mining the Danube, and on October 6 the 2nd Ukrainian Front began its offensive in Hungary. On October 12, American planes attacked the 101/1-3 Fighter Squadrons on their return from the Makó-Szeged region and then attacked Veszprém airport. On October 13 the 102/1 Air Cargo Squadron suffered serious losses at its base at Csákvár. Air raids were also waged against Székesfehérvár, Pápa, and Bánhida⁵². Between October 13 and 20, during the period of the "Debrecen armored battle," Hungarian air units had to engage in air combat with 2,200 Soviet airplanes supporting their land forces.

The Veszprém fighter planes' mission was shifted during October. During the entire month they were deployed only once, with 8 planes, against the Anglo-American forces, while they participated in 20 flight deployments with 158 planes against the Soviets. Against the Soviets, the Hungarians shot down two fighter planes but also lost two pilots⁵³.

Following quite a few serious air battles in the first week of November, the deployment of the Veszprém fighters in large numbers against the Anglo-American air forces was terminated. This was necessitated by the priority of engaging the 17th Airborne Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front which had appeared in Transdanubia in the first third of the month. Then, in the middle of November, they also had to try to hinder the advance of the 2nd Ukrainian Front towards Budapest in the airspace above the Danube-Tisza Region. In November, the Fighter Regiment performed 80 flight deployments against American planes, destroying 2 fighter and 10 bomber planes. The Fighter Regiment also attacked the Soviet air squadrons with 157 planes, destroying 21 Soviet planes. The Veszprém Fighters lost 11 of their comrades in November⁵⁴.

In the first half of December, the two Ukrainian Army Fronts concentrated on preparations to encircle and to take possession of Budapest. Therefore, both the 101st

51 HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk, Regimental Command No. 1 on September 30, 1944, and on January 14, 1945.

52 HL RA - 100. v.rep.e, Regimental Command No. 14 on October 16, 1944; "Veszprém County," pp. 194-196; Gyula Gaál, Szárnyas szállítók (Carriers with Wings), KMSz, 1981/10, p. 12; HL RA - No. 3 Air Force Command on November 17, 1944; and Hungarian Flying, p. 255.

53 A második világháború története 1939-1945, IX (The History of World War II, 1939-1945, vol. IX.) (Budapest, 1980), p. 269, and HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14, Appendix 2.

54 HL RA - 100/M.kir.101.v.rep.e.pk.45.I.14, Appendix 2.

Fighter Regiment and the 102nd Air Force Brigade applied their major efforts in the region of Transdanubia and Budapest. For the Veszprém Fighters this entailed 291 flights during 65 missions against Soviet squadrons, where they shot down 16 Soviet planes, while incurring one man dead, one man missing, and 13 men injured⁵⁵.

And thus the extremely tragic year of 1944 ended. Only one relatively reliable statement remained from the records of the 101st Fighter Regiment and, according to this, during the year they participated in 1,414 flight deployments in 175 missions. They won 161 air victories, lost 42 pilots, lost 18 injured men temporarily unavailable for service, and had 80 planes out of the 400 received during the year remaining functional⁵⁶. (Note that there exist different data in the professional literature about this particular regiment.)

January 1945 brought more desperate fighting, since the Germans, with the active participation of the Hungarian flyers, tried three times to relieve the forces within the “Budapest Festung.” During these attempts they forced the 3rd Ukrainian Front back to the Danube-Tisza Area. However, the Soviet Command did not only want to thwart the German attempts but also aimed to completely take possession of Budapest. Therefore, air combats were concentrated in the airspace of northeastern-eastern Transdanubia, over the River Garam, and over Budapest. The fact that on January 6 all the Hungarian fighter units were taken under the Command of the 76th German Fighter Regiment and that this organization took over commanding all fighter planes in Hungary only further increased Hungarian defenselessness⁵⁷. Although January was indeed unfavorable for flying – there were a total of 7 days suitable for flying and 13 days suitable for limited flying – the German Command sent out masses of flights. The 101/I-II Fighter Battalions participated in 136 flight deployments, won 49 air combats (6 of them without witnesses), and also lost 6 men killed⁵⁸.

In February the most desperate fighting went on for Buda, the region of Székesfehérvár, and for the Garam bridgehead. During these battles the 101st Fighter Regiment participated in 344 air deployments and won 11 (according to other resources 15) air victories, while suffering the loss of 5 men⁵⁹.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 HL RA - 44.doboz, 2.csomó, 82/a fol.

58 Csaba D. Veress, *A balatoni csata (The Battle of Balaton)* (Veszprém megyei Nyomda Vállalat, 1976), p. 85; HL RA - 152/101/I.v.rep.oszt.pk.45.II.1; and HL RA - 211/101/II.v.rep.oszt.pk.45.II.1.

59 HL RA - 389/101/I.v.rep.oszt.pk.45.III.1; HL RA - 389/101/I.v.rep.oszt.pk.45.III.1 with the status report of the second battalion of February 1945, and 514/II.v.rep.oszt.45.III.3; and HL RA - 2346/101/III.v.rep.oszt.45.III.1.

The German Command launched its last major counter-offensive of World War II in the region of Lake Balaton and Lake Velencei on March 6, 1945. In a desperate battle, by March 15 the 3rd Ukrainian Front had managed to fend it off. In the battle the following forces participated: 830,000 soldiers, 12,700 guns and mortars, 1,300 tanks, and 1,850 airplanes⁶⁰. Thus, on March 16 the two Ukrainian Army Fronts could begin their offensive maneuvers against Vienna, the first part of which included taking complete possession of Transdanubia. As a result, Hungarian air squadrons began to move to the westernmost emergency airports in the country and then soon to Austrian bases. Only the 101/II Fighter Battalion's record remains available about these months, and it indicates that the battalion participated in 124 flight deployments, used 752 airplanes, spent 138 hours and 59 minutes in the air, won 11 air victories, and also lost 19 airplanes (not all of them in air combats)⁶¹.

5. Epilogue

The handful of Hungarian pilots who moved to Austria were quite dispirited by the fact that they were no longer defending their own country. Now they engaged in a **few-weeks-long** battle for the interest of "comrades" who were themselves already **agonizing** and who so frequently breached their obligations as allies.

On March 27 the Courier Air Squadron moved to Thalerhof, near Graz. The sub-units of the 101/II Fighter Regiment set out on missions from a field near Grosspetersdorf. On March 29 they began to move to Wiener Neustadt. Two days later they moved yet again, this time to Tulln. From Tulln the deployments of the Hungarian units began at full force in the airspace between Lake Fertő, Vienna, and Pozsony (Bratislava) starting on April 3 onwards. The sad migration continued to Raffelding on April 7, where the 101st Fighter Regiment was again tactically transformed into a battalion. On April 10 it disposed of 51 military and other airplanes⁶². On around April 15 it moved to Eferding, 2 km from Raffelding, where it was united with other Hungarian flyers.

60 A második világháború története 1939-1945, X (The History of World War II, 1939-1945, vol. X.) (Budapest, 1980), p. 238.

61 HL RA - 43.doboz, 14.csomó.

62 HL RA - 101.v.rep.e, 51st and 55th Regimental Commands on April 3 and 10, 1945; J. R. Gaál, The Last Spring of Puma (Air Combat, 1978); Air Force Lieutenant Tibor Tobak's oral statements; and Bírálat M. Szabó Miklós, "A magyar királyi honvéd légierő a második világháborúban (Criticism Concerning Miklós M. Szabó's, The Hungarian Royal Honvéd Air Force in World War II), KMSZ, 1988/17, p. 33.

Contemporary regimental statements acknowledged 126 air victories for the 101st Fighter Regiment/ Battalion during the ten months between June 14, 1944 and April 14, 1945⁶³. Yet all these could not alter the quickly approaching inevitable end. On May 4, 1945 the leftover staff of the regiment set the still available 70 airplanes - according to others only 47 - on fire at Raffelding airport in order to demonstrate that the war for them had ended⁶⁴. This act was also symbolic. The new Hungarian Air Force crumbled into ashes the same way after a short and independent period of development when it achieved considerable success and gained respect.

63 HL RA - 101.v.rep.e, 62nd Regimental Command on April 19, 1945.

64 Air Force Lieutenant Tibor Tobak's oral statements; and Bíráló M. Szabó Miklós, "A magyar királyi honvéd légió a második világháborúban (Criticism Concerning Miklós M. Szabó's, The Hungarian Royal Honvéd Air Force in World War II), KMSz, 1988/17, p. 33.