

The following is an English translation of a practice session in his home of a speech that Aladár Heppes would give on August 18th, 1984, at the Hungarian Aero Museum in Oshawa, Canada. See the published speech in *Magyar Szárnyak*, 1984, No. 13, pages 12-18.

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The practice speech recording begins part-way into the speech.

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... There is a good Hungarian proverb that says, the whip cracks at the end. As the whip cracks on us flight crews, one of the main goals of my commemoration of fighter flight crews is to point out the conditions under which these heroic and important actions took place.

As Gyula Gaál writes in *Magyar Szárnyak*, “What was the point of the Dregelypalánk castle guard consisting of less than 150 men standing in the way of the 8-10,000 soldiers of the Turkish Pasha of Buda for four days?” This occurred 392 years ago. Time and weapons have changed but the place and the heart of the soldiers remained. The air force descendants and fallen heroes of the castle guards of Dregelypalánk deserve to have Hungarian history preserve their memories for posterity.

In January of 1944, only the 102 flying brigade represented the Hungarian national defense on the eastern front in Russia, under a German commander.

Fighter formations: A 102nd independent fighter squadron, then reinforced by a squadron from April, the 192nd fighter flying class. The 102nd remote reconnaissance division, which celebrated its 500th deployment in June 1943 and disbanded in September 1944 after nearly 1,000 deployments. The 102nd near-reconnaissance squadron, the statistics of which are unfortunately unknown to me. A bomber squadron, which became a dive bomber squadron in July and joined the 102/2 dive bomber squadron, which boasted 1,500 sorties already in October 1943. The dive bomber class of 102/1 was expanded. A transport squadron with Junkers 52 aircraft.

The 102nd/1st bomber division, later known as a fighter plane class, and the 101st fighter regiment were the Hungarian Air Force's last fighter air units that laid down their arms on May 5, 1945 at Raffelding Airport in Austria.

The eastern German front line, as well as the flying brigades, were constantly retreating as a result of the attacks of the superior Soviet army. Many articles about the achievements of these air force formations were published in *Magyar*

*Szárnyak* which testified that our planes fought against a hugely superior air force on the eastern front in incredibly difficult conditions.

The situation in Hungary at that time was as follows: Although the National Air Defense Command already had a monitoring and reporting service, as well as standing air defense batteries, the flying domestic air defense had only two squadrons equipped with Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters: one squadron was stationed in Ferihegy, the other in Szolnok. It soon became clear that the reporting and monitoring service of the National Air Defense Command was completely impractical in cooperation with the fighter units.

There was a secret agreement between the Hungarian government and the Allied Powers according to which American bombers would not attack the country. If Hungarian airspace would be violated during the deployments against Austrian and German targets, we would not take any action against them, nor would the anti-aircraft guns target them.

Although shelters were densely built and blackouts were the order of the day, both the government and the civilian population saw these as mere precautionary measures. The “Kuruc” [term has come to designate Hungarians who advocate strict national independence] were confident that, as a result of the negotiations, one or two hundred thousand American paratroopers would float in the sky one fine and invade the country: the “Labanc” [term has come to designate Hungarians who advocate cooperating with outside powers] believed that the Germans would end the war using their miraculous weapons. Both were dreams. On March 19, the German troops invaded Hungary, as they naturally learned about the secret exit negotiations. With this, the agreements regarding the protection of Hungarian airspace from bombing also became invalid.

So, let us see the numerical comparisons of the expected aerial confrontations. May I have the first and second handout distributed.

The American 15th Air Fleet had an average of 1,200 deployable four-engine bombers, hundreds of long-range escort fighters and a larger number of English night bombers. In contrast to this were our already mentioned two fighter squadrons with 24 planes, a night fighter squadron under training and the Aviation Experimental Institute with 12 Messerschmitt 210 planes each, as well as the Aviation Takeover Committee with a few 210 planes. These types of planes were known to be unsuitable for defensive hunting tasks without a light escort attachment.

In March, against the sporadic bombings, the Ferihegy fighter squadron was deployed once with 11 planes, without success, with two heroic casualties. In April, due to poor management and inexperience in overall operations, our fighters came into contact with the Americans only twice out of eight deployments. Gyula Gaál discusses this period in detail in his 1981 [*sic* 1980] *Magyar Szárnyak* article entitled, “Good Weather Expected Over Budapest.”

The first large-scale bomb attack hit Budapest on April 6. As a result of the losses and destruction suffered on April 6, the Air Force Command commissioned me to set up a three-squadron fighter division in Veszprém. The usual organizational paper pushing was eliminated. Instead, the equipment of the Veszprém airport set up as a military airport, included concealment, reporting, control system, material supply, ammunition and fuel supply, resettlement, departures, repair column, setting up, etc., etc., with the enthusiastic support of the airfield commander, Andor Podhradszy, Aerial Colonel, we advanced with feverish speed. The two aforementioned fighter squadrons were supplemented by a third one from Matyásföld, and in the second half of May approximately forty Messerschmitt Bf 109 and planes like the Hungarian Royal 101st Air Defense Fighter Wing were ready for deployment. Gyula Gaál also discusses the following period in detail in his article, “White Cross and White Star” in the 1983 *Magyar Szárnyak*.

I consider it necessary to mention, in order to understand what will be presented later, that during the first two deployments of the unit, it was again not possible to establish contact with the American attackers. In both cases, the company was deployed with 32 planes each, as a result of an alert, with formations taking off on the 30th of May and the 2nd of June. During the first deployment, while my unit was sent to different airspaces for about an hour and a half, the Americans had long since left the country's airspace. On the second of June, on the occasion of the first American shuttle flight -- when the American forces landed in the Soviet Union from Italy -- bombing Szeged, Szolnok, Miskolc, Kolozsvár and Debrecen, the National Air Defense Command directed my unit to Győr, then after fruitless wanderings on to Esztergom and finally to Budapest. Naturally, we were late, and there was no contact again.

I don't want to bore the audience with details, so now I will only quote some data from the first appendix I handed out regarding the incredible ratio of attackers and defenders, as well as the quality and armament of the opposing aircraft. I support these numbers with the graphic representation distributed as appendix

number 2, which summarizes the twenty largest American deployments, a simpler presentation of the incredible disproportion that existed between the attackers and the defenders.

From the numbers in the first appendix which summarizes the twenty largest American attacks, we can see that against 9,560 bombers and 4,000 fighter planes, the defense was able to engage with 602 planes. This consisted of 480 Hungarian and 122 German machines.

Let's look at some deployment numbers. On June 16, the Americans introduced 928 planes: 638 bombers and 290 fighter planes. In contrast we had 28 machines. On June 26th, the American sent 977 planes: 677 bombers, and 300 fighters compared to our 35.

If these figures are not enough, let's see a comparison of the planes. The Messerschmitt 109 machine had six--three guns of 750 rounds [of ammunition]. The Mustang had 6 machine guns with 1,800 rounds. The Lightning fighter plane with 5 machine guns and 1,800 rounds. Both American fighters were faster and had better visibility than the Messerschmitt 109s. The four-engine bombers had 16 planes with weapons of 13,900 rounds per plane. There were other Messerschmitt 109s with machine guns but because of their reduced speed and poor turning ability, they could not be used. The Germans only used such machines with strong fighter pilot experience. We did not have such machines.

Now let's look at the second attachment. Where you see the twenty largest attacks listed, the total number of American planes deployed was 13,568. Of this, the number of deployed American bombers was 9,568 and the number of deployed American fighter planes was 4,000. We shot down 58 of the bombers. This is 0.6% of the deployed bombers. Fighter planes: we shot down 52 fighter planes, that is a full 1.3% of U.S. fighter planes deployed. In total, therefore, the number of American planes shot down was 110 at this time, which was 0.8% of the American planes deployed. Six hundred and two defense fighters stood against them. Of these 602 fighters during this period, 480 were Hungarian and 122 were German. American losses claimed by the Germans during the deployment are unknown. As such those numbers are not included in the previous reported casualty numbers. These are only the Hungarian fighter pilots shot-down numbers. The number of shot-down, wounded and seriously damaged Hungarian fighter planes during the period can be put at 60. Replacing them was no problem.

I regret to inform you that we had other disadvantages not only associated with the enemy. Since the facts to be presented in the following can be read from the documents, regimental orders, and deployment reports in the Archives of the Military History Museum, I will not be divulging any military secrets by revealing them.

Our disadvantages were incorrect management, situational communications, and inexperience in leadership on the part of the National Air Defense Command. An example of this is the above-mentioned mismanagement of May 3rd and June 2nd. On July 8th, we had a squadron deployed, when around noon the National Air Defense Command ordered the squadron home, and stopped alerting the airport by contending that the Americans had left the airspace. After about 10 minutes, the Americans bombed the Veszprém airport from a low altitude. The fighter division and the airport command had about 200 wounded and 28 heroic deaths. We were also given unenforceable orders. For example, on June 16, when the squadron was attacked from behind by about 200 American fighters, I was ordered to get away from the fighters and to attack only the bombers.

With regards to our aerial battles, a new condition was introduced to notate our aerial victories in which we were required to indicate the exact location of the downed enemy plane's impact. From 8-9,000 meters? During aerial combat? While being pursued by American fighter planes? This condition was introduced so that an anti-aircraft artillery committee could determine from the wreckage whether the plane was shot down by anti-aircraft fire or by fighter pilots.

Perhaps this was the consequence of the fact that the first confirmation of the aerial victories claimed from April 3 appeared on September 23, 1944, which was 5 months later, in the confidential order of the Air Force Command No. 63. Sometime later, the Air Force Command ordered the repromotion of 32 air victory claims, because they were "probably lost" at the National Air Defense Command, which had been disbanded in the meantime.

The consequences of this was that the first medals reached the unit in December 1944 and 60-70% were awarded to posthumously fallen heroes. These fighter pilots fought against the Americans for 8 months in the above-mentioned conditions without any recognition.

The fighters celebrated their hundredth air victory on August 22, registered and presented for verification. Although this was widely praised by the Hungarian press, the Hungarian Air Defense Command did not memorialize it. The only letter of appreciation I received was from the German Air Force General Fütterer. The original of this letter is now in the possession of the military Museum.

The Air Force, as an expensive type of weapon, had never been a favorite of the Hungarian military leadership. But the afore-mentioned shows that there was a complete lack on the part of the leadership, at least until the fall, of the moral support that our pilot deserved. To what extent the thousand-year-old Kuruc-Labanc policy contributed to this, I do not know. In any case, when I received the order to set up the second division in July, I ran into obstacles everywhere during its implementation and it took three months, instead of one, to set up the first division.

Of course, we also had advantages. Morally, we fought for our country and our people. Camaraderie was excellent. Those who were shot or made a forced landing and were not taken prisoner, and if they were not injured, they soon flew again. Those that were wounded were treated lovingly in a Hungarian hospital and if they recovered, they flew again. There were 10 such as this out of 14 instances.

Financially, our damaged, or forced landed planes were put back in line within hours or days by the excellent and enthusiastic technical staff -- the silent companions of our results: if necessary, they made two planes into one.

At the end of the year, the commander of the German anti-aircraft fighter forces stationed in Vienna, Colonel Handrick, issued a summary report on the performance of the Hungarian and German anti-aircraft fighter squadrons up to the end of November in Hungarian airspace, in defense of attacks against Hungary. According to them, the Germans deployed 932 planes and the Hungarians 649. The Germans shot down 53 bombers and 20 fighters, so a total of 73 planes. The Hungarians shot down 61 bombers and 48 fighters, a total of 109. The losses to the Germans were 43 in personnel and 88 in aircraft, to the Hungarians 30 in personnel and 78 in aircraft. It can be seen from the above statistics that the Hungarian fighters achieved more results with fewer deployments and less personnel and machine losses than the German anti-aircraft fighters.

To this I must also add that the National Air Defense Command had already ceased to exist at that time, so it did not issue a report. According to our own data, German fighters took part against American missions, whose task was to bomb Hungarian targets, only four times, with approximately 120 planes (and not 932 planes). It is possible that several deployments took place in the airspace over western Hungary, but these were exclusively for the protection of targets in areas under German control.

In this year's *Magyar Szárnyak*, Gyula Gaál will publish an article entitled, "Military Theatre Above the Clouds," which discusses the activities of the Hungarian-German as well as the Soviet-Romanian air force, their achievements and losses, so to speak, day by day from September to the end of the year.

In short, all the fighter formations of the Air Force were used to support the ground battles in the country. The deployments of the Americans did not decrease, only their application changed, in the almost complete absence of our fighter defense. The bombers destroyed cities, villages, and bridges in smaller groups while the fighter planes were tasked with indiscriminate scanning of roads, railways, airports and shipments.

In the third handout, I list the opposing forces from September to October. As we can see, at that time the ratio was six or seven times in favor of the Soviet-Romanian air force. Budapest was surrounded by Soviet forces two days before Christmas. This was the last Christmas for the Royal Hungarian Air Force. Finally, I would like to provide some data from the fighter regiment's year-end report which also includes the results against the Soviet Union. Number of deployments were 175, number of deployed machines 1,414. Number of planes shot down: 58 single-engine, 35 twin-engine and 68 four-engine aircraft. A total of 161 machines.

Our losses: 32 heroic dead, including a squadron commander [he says 2 squadron commanders in published speech], 3 missing, 18 wounded (4 unfit, 4 still in hospital, 10 deployed again), so the number of heroically dead, missing and unfit for deployment is 39, which is roughly equal to the number of fully regularized pilots of a fighter division.

In conclusion, at the end of 1946, I was living on the southern shore of Wörthersee in Austria, when I received a letter from a former German flight major living on the northern shore of the lake, who in 1944 was the leader of a German propaganda unit and spent two days in Veszprém in June with his group in the 101st fighter division, taking photographs and making audio tapes. He informed me that he had somehow kept the test copies of the recorded films and that he would like to give them to me. Of course, I immediately paddled across the lake to him and put the pictures into a photo album. I am now offering this 140-picture photo album to the museum. My words of dedication which I wrote in the album at the time, and, which after 40 years, could not better describe the heroes of all the fighting units of the Hungarian Air Force in 1944. It sounded like this:

“This booklet preserves the memory of heroes who--fell, are alive, or have since died--risking their lives honorably in a noble fight, in the struggle for the people, in defense of the well-being and progress of their communities, large or small, or just to protect their opportunities for a better life.”

“A friend or an enemy is not determined by these heroes, but by history, geographical, economic and national conditions.”

“These heroes are simple, but noble actors of a historical struggle in which they did not see and did not pursue political goals. By risking their lives, many by sacrificing them, did they fight for the mere life of their relatives and their nation? They fought nobly for a more beautiful Hungarian future. They fought with honor for the Hungarian flag, which they did not abandon in either a good or bad state.”