

THE 'BOHEMIAN' FLIEGERKOMPAGNIE

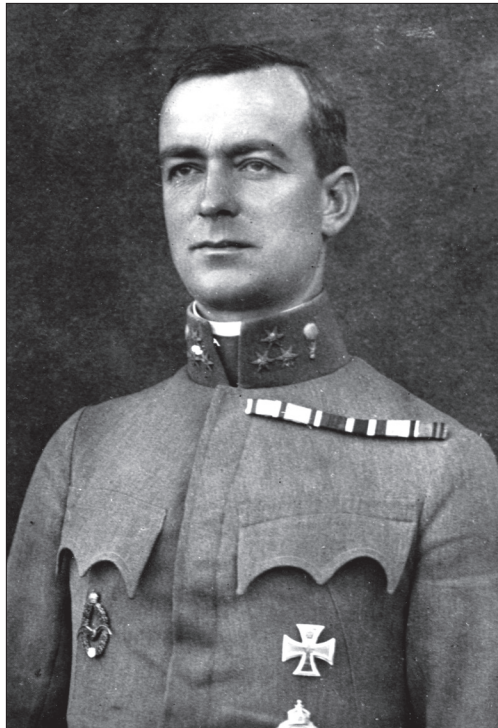
on the Romanian Front 1916-1918

by Michal Plavec

ON THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR with Romania, parts of the Austro-Hungarian flying service were deployed there to support the ground troops. One of these was Fliegerkompagnie 29 (FliK 29). This unit was established, in June 1916, on Strasshof an der Nordbahn aerodrome, north of Vienna. The company is sometimes called 'Bohemian' because many members of this unit came from the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Among them were Commanding Officers who were Czechs by nationality including Hptm Oskar Šafář (who died of wounds after a dogfight with Russian planes on 25 August 1916) and Hptm Karel Huppner.

The Kingdom of Bohemia, or more precisely the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It consisted of Bohemia, Moravia and the Austrian part of Silesia. Around five million inhabitants lived in the Kingdom by 1910, two thirds of them being Czechs by nationality and the rest being German. In total, ethnic Czechs comprised 13% of the inhabitants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with Bohemian and Moravian Germans making up another 6%. At least 627 pilots and 344 observers from the Kingdom of Bohemia served in the Austro-Hungarian Air Force during WWI. This represented around one third of the Austro-Hungarian flying personnel, approximately 25% of them being German and 8% Czech.

Pilots Kpl Josef Novák, Kpl Josef Žurovec, Kpl Karl Seltner, Kpl Andreas Dombrowski, Kpl Andreas Tompa and Lt id Res. Otto Schleich and observers Hptm Karel Huppner (CO), Hptm Arthur Böhm, Obltn Josef Pospíšil, Lt n Heinrich Harditzky, Lt n Béla Abay, Lt n Hans Leiner, Lt n Ottmar Schwarzenbach, Fähnr Rudolf Benno von Hammerlitz and Kdtt Gustav Geyer served in FliK 29 at the end of November 1916. The Technical Officer was Kdtt Asp Ludwig Werner, since Fähnr. von Hammerlitz was temporarily on leave at this time. Huppner, Pospíšil, Geyer, Novák and Žurovec were ethnic Czechs, while Seltner was German by nationality and was born in Western Bohemia. Dombrowski came from Moravská Ostrava and was German by nationality. He was recuperating in hospital in November and December 1916. Fw Bedřich Bartoš, another ethnic Czech, led the mechanics. All of the pilots were promoted during November and December 1916 to the rank of Zugführer.



Karel Huppner, CO of FliK 29.

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FliK 29 operated, from the beginning of July 1916, on the Russian Front in Galicia, mainly as a reconnaissance and long-reconnaissance unit. The personal diary of Josef Žurovec, who served as pilot in the company, sheds more light on their operations, the behaviour of flying personnel and the unit's living conditions. Žurovec's diary covers the period from 3 July 1916 through 9 July 1917.

Josef Žurovec noted that the order to transfer to the Romanian Front came on 19 November 1916. FliK 29 was based at Alsóvisó (Romanian Vișeu de Jos) aerodrome in present day Romania, which was still part of the Kingdom of Hungary at that time. Flyers of the company operated from there over Ukraine.

When the company left Felsővisó (Romanian Vișeu de Sus) on 24 November 1916 in cars and lorries, there was a ceremony held to see the flyers off. Their route took them through the towns of Máramarosziget (Romanian Sighetu Marmăției), Szatmárnémeti (Romanian Satu Mare), Nagykaróly (Romanian Carei), Marosludas (Romanian Luduș), Marosvásárhely (Romanian Târgu Mureș), Székelykocsárd (Romanian Lunca Mureșului), Gyergyószentmiklós (Romanian Gheorgheni), Csíkszereda (Romanian Miercurea Ciuc) to the Csíkcsicsó (Romanian Ciceu) aerodrome. They travelled around 620 kilometres. They arrived at Csíkcsicsó on 27 November 1916 and were welcomed by members of FliK 13 which had already been based there.

FliK 29 was sent there to replace FliK 1. Headquarters of 1st Austro-Hungarian Army ordered, on 24 November 1916, that FliK 33 and the newly formed FliK 29 would be subordinate to Gruppenkommando General der Infanterie von Litzmann. The operational area was given as from Crăcăoas/Glodului Mount in the Tarcău Mountains to Bacău and over the Borca-Dambrosca-Fălticeni road.

Due to bad weather, there were no flights between 28 and 30 November 1916. This allowed for Žurovec and the others to look for accommodation. They successfully found housing in a nearby village close to the airfield. The aerodrome was situated south of Csíkcsicsó (Romanian Ciceu) which means he was probably referring to the Toplița-Ciuc village. The aerodrome was stated to be satisfactory with a length of 400 metres and a width of 150 metres. The weather still had not