

Gábor Dr. BERKOVICS, Zoltán Dr. KRAJNC

Budapest, 2011.
4. évfolyam 2. szám**THE HUNGARIAN OBSERVER AND REPORTING SERVICE
BEFORE THE WORLD WAR II (1938-39)****A MAGYAR FIGYELŐ ÉS JELENTŐ SZOLGÁLAT HELYZETE
A II. VILÁGHÁBORÚ ELŐTT (1938-1939)**

The authors present a very important period of the Hungarian Observer and Reporting Service (1938-1939) in their article. In 1938, the so far dysfunctional service came to a significant period of its history. By the financial source made available, the stocking up, equipping and operating of the systems could finally begin. The actual creation of the observer and reporting service had a fundamental effect on the functionality of the air force and air defence artillery and on the effectiveness of their application. The article demonstrates that the military leadership was able and ready to use the service and they made it an integral part of the Hungarian Military.

INTRODUCTION

During the majority of the 30s, the Hungarian observer and reporting service was practically inoperative. Although, theoretically, its code of practice was grounded, the necessary levels, number, structure, stock and equipment of the belonging subunits were specified, the chronic lack of funds made it impossible to set up the system within the desired quantity and quality. Therefore, by 1938, the actual and practical state of the Hungarian observer and reporting service basically didn't improve much. A procedure to equip the observer sentries/stations had already begun, but the communication was still a problem, as it was limited to civil and postal lines. This year, the systematizing of the automated assets of the Defence Equipment Institute began.

PREPARATION ONTO THE WAR

The anti-aircraft defence plans for the cities and villages made by the observer and reporting services were laid down and their authorizations were in process. This activity was done according to the rules of anti-aircraft defence 1935. act XII. sections 1., 2., 3., 9. and MM (Ministry of Defence), IM (Interior Ministry) decree 61000/Eln.-Igv.-1938. By these documents, the National Air Defence Command prepared the paper of 'Draft Decree for the Organization of an Anti-aircraft Defence Service', which meant: 'The alert service comes into operation when air defence alert is ordered.'¹ The main aim was to alert the authorities. They included the alert of the "A" type industrial areas (those of which determined the production of an industrial or military industrial area countrywide) with special importance.² The General Staff agreed on the whole and didn't find it necessary to add anything to it. As a matter of fact, these times the Ministry of Defence issued regulations controlling air defense, including the activities of the military and civil observer, reporting, alerting and information services.³

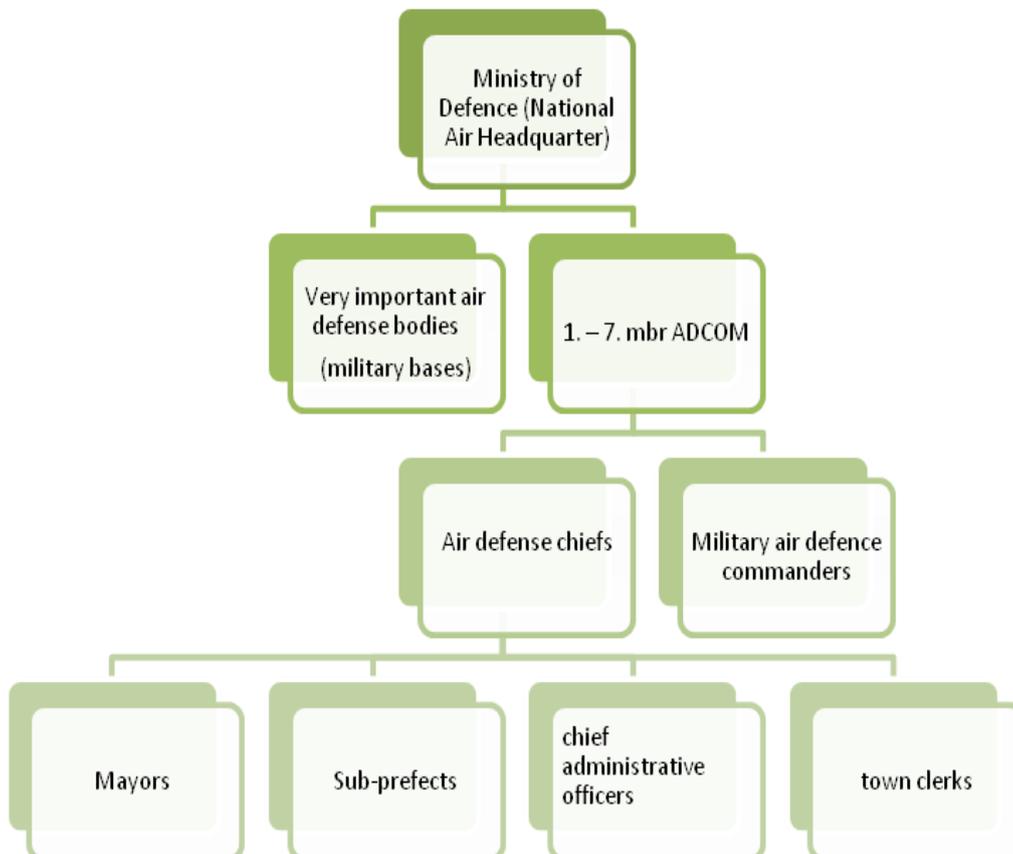
¹ Military History Archive (HL), VKF p1. 2169/Eln. 1938.

² same place

³ some of them: 61000/Eln.-Igv.-1938., 62000/Eln. Igv.-1938., 62100/Eln. Igv.-1938., 88000/Eln. Igv.-1939., 88001/Eln. Igv.-1939.

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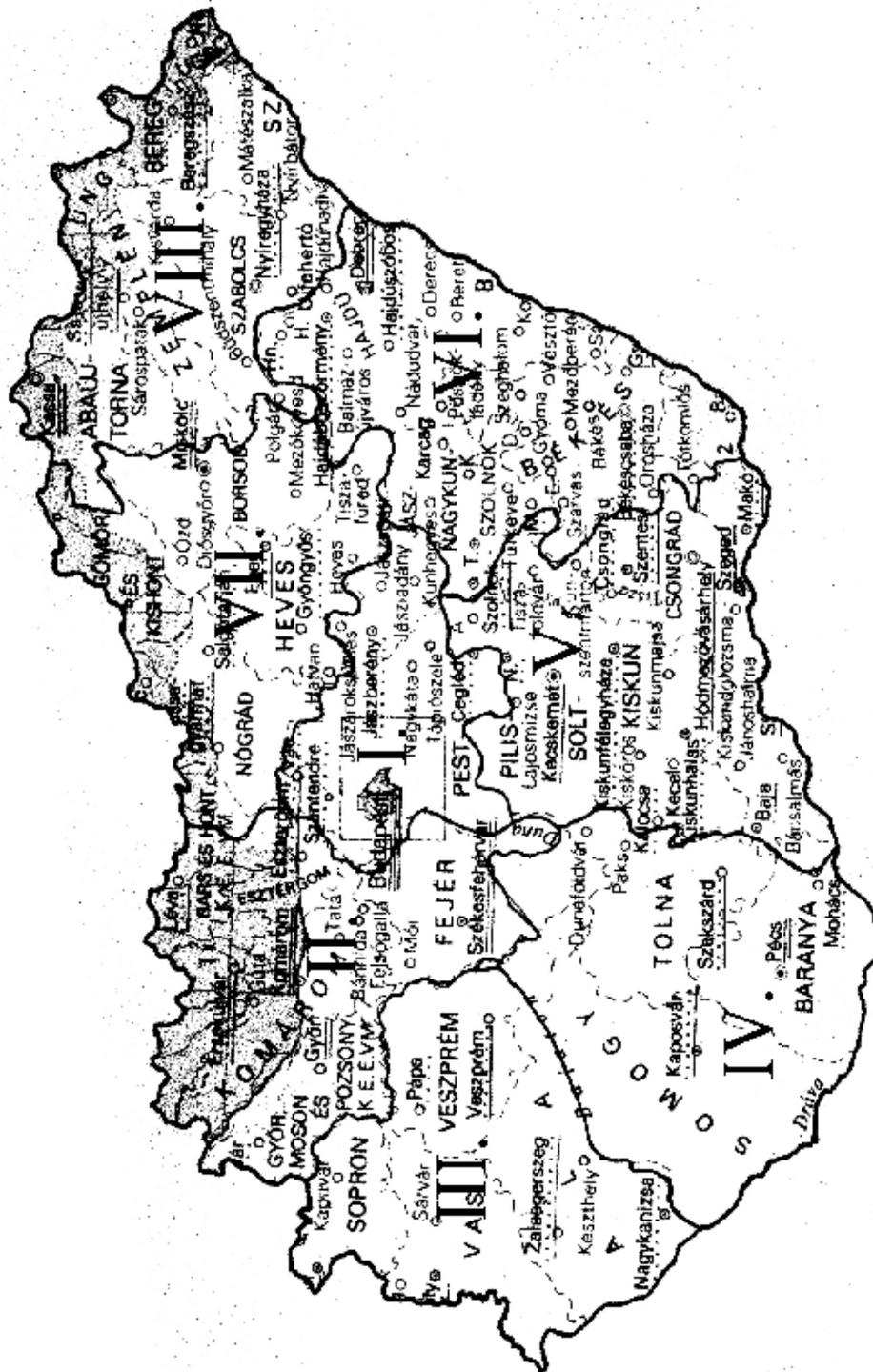
Budapest, 2011.
4. évfolyam 2. szám*The general schema of the air defence*

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The Boundaries of Air Defense Districts, 1938⁴



⁴ According to the draft of HL, VKF p. 1. 3653/Eln. 1939.

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In decree 61000/Eln.-Igv.-1938 the duties of the air defence observation posts were also specified: “to report all air activities which appear in the given district.” The observation posts were subordinated to the air defence centres. The civil organizations were poorly equipped which is well illustrated by having to report via telephone or, by light and smoke signs (!). The alerts were ordered by the air defence centres in their own districts.⁵ The areas of the civil air defence districts were not the same as the military ones. Many civil centres belonged to the Air Defence Centre (KERLÉKÖZ) (A simple scheme of air defence is illustrated in draft 1.) The task unit is well described by a previous statement of the General Staff: “The air defence observation and report system must serve the military and civil air defence at the same time.”⁶

In 1938, the preparation of air defence for military purposes began.⁷ In February, in the Official Gazette of National Defence, it was ordered to equip the observation service of Air Defence Command with communication installations.⁸

In “Military Regulation” (draft) issued in 1938, the air defence and reporting service was dealt with in details, which was indicated as the second paragraph of ground air support.⁹ It didn’t indicate a priority order, as for example the 3rd – weapons got more attention and financial support those times. It was recorded that: “Air defence, according to where it works, is divided into the air defence of the country and of the raised army.” Actual military basic principles were also put down. The draft dealt with the application and combat order of the observer posts as well. According to its definition there had to be an air defence circle set up around the Air Defence Centre, if it was impossible, and then spotting lines had to be set up in the more important directions.¹⁰ It happened so in its actual realization. The Air Defence Areas/Districts within their own areas around the leading centres set up their units at the border of their fields. Naturally, they were more densely built near the country borders and in more dangerous directions, consequently in the inner areas there were less units.

The duties of the observer and reporting services were divided into strategic and military ones. The previous was provided by the “national” system (responsible for the nationwide duties, scouting and alerting the approaching air raids), the latter was provided by the temporarily appointed organizations of troops (responsible for the safety and informing of their higher units, units, subunits.)

⁵ HL, VKF p1. 3181/Eln. 1936

⁶ HL, VKF p1. 105028/Eln. 1936

⁷ HL, VKF p1. 3585/Eln. 1938 and HL, VKF p1. 3590/Eln. 1938.

⁸ Honvédségi Közlöny 2. edition, 1st February 1938. 64510/elv VI.-7.ö-1927

⁹ Military Regulation (draft) 1st part Military Principles. Budapest, Stádium Press Office 1938. p74.

¹⁰ same place, p75.

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The military units of different levels and duties were obliged to form "unit air defence observers and reporting service" out of their own staff. Air defence training was a part of general training, which consisted of the following main areas: aircraft recognition, handling of the necessary and available devices (range-finders, telescope, etc.) and the application of liaison devices (communication). The supplement of the air defense observer and reporting service units was also regarded a condition besides training to organize the activity in a "tense" way, to equip adequately.

The organizational changes in 1938 temporarily placed the military services under "Air Defence". It lasted until 1941. The arms programme issued on 5 March in Győr and its opportunities brought by that came at the best time for the air defence which was stressed in the draft anyway. The General Staff and the observer and reporting services as well had to accomplish new tasks in the second half of the year. After the reannexation of Felvidék (11927 km², 869299 people) the structure of the army and the military air defense was widened. The new areal division of eight Air Defence Districts was done (2nd draft), the KERLÉKÖZs' places were designated and the VIIIth Areal Air Defence Centre was established in Nyíregyháza.¹² It naturally increased the number of the ordered devices and the necessary staff. The OLP (National Air Defence Headquarters) has started testing the operation of the temporarily set up national air defence observation and reporting system besides the training, primarily from the information/ communication points of view. It was ordered to do an exercise on 30th May at the Vth, on 2nd June at the VIIth, on 4th June at the 1st and on 8th June at the IInd Divisional Air Defence Centres.¹³ They wanted to get answers first of all for the following questions:

- Is the current control of the observer and reporting service working well?
- How long does it take for the air defence to fully report?
- How much does a sentry report cost?
- Is the training of the staff adequate?
- Are the electric equipments of KERLÉKÖZs appropriate?
- Is the reporting system able to provide the operation of the national air defence observer and reporting services?
- Are the national air defence system and the mail system able to cooperate adequately?
- Can the mail system provide the necessary solution for the tasks?

According to the findings it turned out that the activities of the running systems met the requirements very incidentally, occasionally and the equipments and the whole system needed to be modernized.

The Hungarian military command constantly kept an eye on the Spanish Civil War. According to the received wisdom the targets of air attacks were "military transport, military industry, augmentation and "political" centres. They came to the conclusion that even in case they had a well-organized observer and reporting service, only 30 kms behind the sentries (which was a much better achievement than it was prognosticated) could the aircraft-forces successfully perform the soonest. This "blind spot" had to be covered by air defence artillery weapons by all means.¹⁴

The programme of Győr helped the air defence observer and reporting service improve. Finally the purchase of special- and communication technical devices began.

FUNCTION AND EXPERIENCES IN THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR

In 1939, after the reoccupation of Kárpátalja (12061 km², 469 866 people) the area was annexed to the VIIIth Air Defence District. Because of the expansion, the military command modified the boundaries of the Air Defence Districts (3rd

¹² HL, VKF p1. 3419/Eln. 1940.

¹³ HL, VKF p1. 2514/Eln. 1938.

¹⁴ HL, VKF p1. 2621/Eln. 1938. and HL, VKF p1. 2912/Eln. 1937.

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draft).¹⁵ In the beginning of the year four Areal Air Defence Centres (I. Budapest, II. Székesfehérvár then Komárom, VI. Szolnok, VII. Miskolc) were equipped with appropriate telecommunication systems but their subordinates were still found wanting, only the purchase and distribution of telescopes were uninterrupted.¹⁶ The majority of the sentries got the optical devices by July. The other four centres (III. Veszprém, IV. Kaposvár, V. Kiskunfélegyháza, VIII. Nyíregyháza)¹⁷ were still inoperative as they didn't get special devices, still the General Staff urged to set up eight operational KERLÉKÖZs. Soon they started to automate the VIII. Nyíregyháza, the VI. Szolnok and VII. Miskolc Centres. By this time 231 sentries belonged to the national observer and reporting systems.¹⁸ The HM (Ministry of Defence) Air Defences Group chief suggested their expansion and setting up new subordinates. According to his account, 336 sentries were needed.¹⁹ Troops were being equipped continuously. The ministry allocated 248, then 41 telescopes (for the sentries), taking the need and lack of devices of the new and already operating sentries and the withdrawing units into consideration.²⁰ Besides, they started to organize the national moving air defense observer and reporting squadrons (only in 1942 was the first one set up) and their observer platoons. A headquarter was built on Gellért Hill for the Air Defence National Command, the so called "Szikla Központ" (Rock Centre). From here, they planned the control of the observer and reporting service, the air defence artillery, the air forces and the national general air defence.

Because of the tense political situation with Romania, in April it was decided to strengthen the observing system in the eastern part of the country, at the expense of the western regions.²¹ 37 observer and reporting sentries were redeployed to the V. Kiskunfélegyháza (16 sentries) and VI. Szolnok (21 sentries) KERLÉKÖZ units.²² A lot of financial, technical and personnel conditions had to be made for this. New telecommunication lines and a Danube mail line needed to be set up, the Budapest system partially had to be rearranged, observer sentries had to be built (holes, raised hides, sentry- and signalman cottages), postal electric lines had to be lengthened to the sentries. Equipment and above all, money and time were needed for this. HTI suggested implementing R-14F radio devices in the Areal Air Defence Centres, at the air defence observer and reporting units (these organizations were subordinate to the air defence artillery) and at their sub-units. They wanted to make the connections more reliable and much faster and to relieve the civil telephone system by this solution. The General Staff agreed to fulfil the plan, though not immediately but in the long run. A permanent national air defence radio system was to be set up according to the plan, which was going to be completed by mobile elements.²³ But for the time being, the military command took only the lower level and efficiency air defence observer and reporting system into consideration.

CONCLUSION

In July and October many air defence exercises were completed.²⁴ According to the assessment and analyses, it turned out that the air defence reports – in a most optimal case – can get into the Aerial Air Defence Centres in 3-6 minutes via the manual-operating centres. This way at least 6-12 minutes passed between the observation and the activation of

¹⁵ HL, VKF p1. 3506/Eln. 1940.

¹⁶ HL, VKF p1. 4390/Eln. 1939.

¹⁷ HL, VKF p1. 3653/Eln. 1939. 1st supplement and HL, VKF p14551/Eln. 1940.

¹⁸ HL, VKF p1. 4390/Eln. 1939.

¹⁹ HL, VKF p1. 3653/Eln. 1939. 1st supplement

²⁰ HL, VKF p1. 32798/Eln. 3/a. 1939.

²¹ HL, VKF p1. 4185/Eln. 1939.

²² HL, VKF p1. 4390/Eln. 1939. and H HL, VKF p1. 32798/Eln. 3/a. 1939L.

²³ HL, VKF p1. 5306/Eln. 1939.

²⁴ HL, VKF p1. 4205/Eln. 1939., HL, VKF p1. 4308/Eln. 1939. and HL, VKF p1. 4924/Eln. 1939.

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intelligence, including the data- and information process. The low trained staff of sentries and the insufficient equipment of the moving air defence sentries were its main reason (they didn't own a radio system).²⁵ It turned out during the following practices that the 6-12-minute-information-processing time was not too bad, as the lines were sometimes so busy that this duration could even increase to 15-35 minutes.

According to the plan of the National Air Defence General Staff, the automation of VIII. Nyíregyháza Centre had to be finished, the VI. Szolnok and VII. Miskolc Centres by February 1940 and by June all the rest of the Aerial Air Defence Centres.

In the General Staff's mind it was a mission optimistic and impossible.²⁶ They were right. But by the end of the year, even though they were not fully automated, the I. Budapest, II. Komárom, VI. Szolnok and VII. Miskolc "KERLÉKÖZ"s and their subunits were mission ready.²⁷

Keywords: Hungarian military history, history of air defence, Observer and Reporting Service, World War II.

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