



Hungarian Firefighter Association

150 years

1870-2020





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Dear Reader!



It happened already 150 years ago that thanks to the intervention of Count Ödön Széchenyi, son of the „greatest Hungarian”, the Hungarian Firefighter Association has been founded. The passed 150 years – several lifespans – also contain a dozen important chapters of history.

The Hungarian Firefighter Association which considers the organization founded in 1870 its predecessor, represents the spirit of those voluntary firefighters who defend the values and life of their human fellows from the end

of the 19th century till our days, doing it so that they do not expect neither any compensation, nor thankfulness for their work.

We believe that it is worth to introduce all this self-devoted activity, the efforts, the „everyday heroism” and the outstanding performances, as all these form an important part of the Hungarian society and the Hungarian history defining our identity. It is especially true in our days. The story also includes a chapter about the help of the voluntary firefighters living in the Carpathian Basin one and a half century after the beginnings, given to each other and to the society across the borders.

Dear Reader, let us introduce to you the world of the firefighters – voluntary firefighters – in this publication. This publication honors the memory of those represented by the Hungarian Firefighter Association: the voluntary firefighters, the municipality and the industrial fire brigades, who educate themselves, confront the elements and defend human lives and the values of society at the expense of their free time.

Several stormy decades are behind us but there is a way forward: the renewing association

wishes to become as strong as it was long ago in order to gather all the voluntary, the municipality and the industrial fire brigades under its flag and to represent successfully their professional interests.

Budapest, January 1, 2020

Tibor Dobson brig. gen.
President
Hungarian Fire-
fighter Association

Saint Florian, protect us!

As is the case in many countries, the patron saint of firefighting in Hungary is Saint Florian. His life and especially his death is a great example of strong personal credo and death-defying valour. He lived around the turn of the 4th century; as a soldier in one of the roman legions he rose to the rank of centurion (commander). As such, he was stationed in the Noricum province (today an area of Austria) along with a detachment of specialist soldiers performing mainly firefighting duties. He took up Christianity early on, and never hid his beliefs.

He became a legend during one of the last, largest, and bloodiest state persecutions of Christianity. Florian, having denied to persecute



Nonetheless, most people know Florian for being the patron saint of firefighters. Most of the times he is depicted as a roman centurion, carrying a red flag in one hand, pouring water on a burning building with the other. The first volunteer firefighting organization established in 1861 in Hungary declared in a decree that the flag must contain a rendition of Saint Florian. One of the firefighter relics has a saying beneath the saint's figure: "One for all, and all for one".



Christians, was detained for doing so. He bravely declared himself a Christian, and had not denied his faith even during torture.

Ultimately, he was drowned in the river by his executioners. He was canonised after his death, and enjoyed enormous fame throughout Europe. He is the official patron saint of the city of Linz (Austria) and also Poland; the relics of the saint were transported to Krakow in as early as 1184 with the blessing of Pope Lucius III.



Rallied under one banner



The flag or banner is one of the most important symbols of unity and camaraderie throughout the world; the phrase "being rallied under one banner" literally means that everyone follows the same path united by one common goal.

The firefighter banners are not different in this matter. The unity on these banners is very often represented by the depiction of Saint Florian, being a central figure in firefighting heraldry.

The banner was such an important piece in 19th-century Hungary, that newly formed volunteer firefighter organizations fought to the nail to make one. They spent a great deal on the banner, often before they even bought the firefighting equipment itself. As a result, some of these firefighters were literally

rallied under a true piece of art, made by masters of trade (embroiderers, tailors and so forth).

The **canvas** of the flag usually contained various embroidered

texts, phrases in connection with firefighting itself.

The **ribbon** (on the flagstaff) contained dates of significance of the particular company.

On the top of the flagstaff there was the **staff ornament** or **finial**, often in the shape of an eagle, lion or even a Saint Florian figurine.

Several so called **flagpins** were pushed into the flagstaff, carrying the names of founders who made donations towards the making of the flag.

The credo of the firefighters is also represented on these, eg. "Glory to God and a helping hand to man" or "United we stand in the face of danger".

Images show the banner of Volunteer Firefighters of the Town of Tab (on display in the Central Museum of Disaster Management, Budapest)



*"This is a firefighter banner that, thanks to the fantastic patterns and motifs it is bearing, is the object of amazement and awe."
(Grazer Tagespost, 1890)*

And they acted quickly

"Not only because my fellow Hungarians are brave and chivalrous in nature, but because of reasons both financial and social, a [firefighting] system based on volunteer firefighters seems to be the most appropriate."

(Count Ödön Széchenyi)

In Hungary, Count Ödön Széchenyi was the main advocate of the firefighter movement. He organized it after the British model.

However, a system of volunteer firefighter organizations was already in place in rural Hungary before a volunteer firefighter command was even established in Budapest. What's more, the rural firefighter brigades already expressed their need to establish a country-wide association.

Frigyes Rösch, commander of the Sopron City Volunteer Firefighters was the main advocate



Count Ödön Széchenyi (in the middle, with sword)

of such an association. He started petitioning the Home Office as soon as 1869, quoting the need for a national association and the funding of volunteer firefighter organizations through fire insurance companies.

Frigyes Rösch and his fellow

firefighters were the first to draw up a draft statute for the Hungarian National Firefighter Association. The founding meeting was held on 5 December 1870 in Budapest, and was attended by delegates from a total of 17 organizations.

The rest is, as they say, history.



Count Ödön Széchenyi



New City Hall of Pest (1870s)

Fortepan / Budapest Archive / Archive label: HU.BFL.XV.19.d.1.05.039

75 years of work

The newly founded Hungarian National Firefighter Association was active until 1945 (its temporary suspension). The main goals of the association were the advancement of the firefighter movement in Hungary, the establishment and development of firefighter organizations and the training of firefighters, and, most importantly, the ratification of firefighting in Hungary.

After 65 years of hard work, one of the most important achievements was born: the Act of 1936 on advanced firefighting in Hungary.

The statute regulated the following parts of the Hungarian firefighting movement:

- establishing and maintaining professional fire services,
- maintaining, supplementing fire equipment,
- establishing firefighting authorities,
- contribution of fire insurance companies.

Hungarian National Firefighter Association had to "capitulate" at the end of World War II: it was suspended (only temporarily, but for a long time) by the Hungarian Provisional Government in 1945.



Firefighters (1908 / Fortepan)



*Millennium Exhibition: Building of the Fire Guard (1896)
Fortepan / Budapest Archive / Archive label: HU.BFL.XV.19.d.1.09.096*



Budapest, Firefighters of the 14th District (1940 / Fortepan)

On the threshold of a new world

After a 45-year hiatus the HNFA continued its work. It is no wonder that after all the years of rigorous regulations and centralization from soviet era, firefighters all around the country sighed with relief and local and regional associations began to take form.

23 June 1990 was another significant milestone in the history of Hungarian firefighting: *a call to reorganize the national association of firefighters.*

With only a small delay, the direct successor of the HNFA – called the Hungarian Firefighter Association – was born on 21 October 1990 in Balatonfüred, Hungary. It is a clear indication of the hard work behind the reorganization process that the presidential board approved the Articles of Association only on 3 October 1992.

“This is not an initiative taken by our generation, and neither is recognising the fact that firefighting can only be effective when based on the widest public agreement. More than a 100 years passed since the formulation of this principle. Cooperation is still a profound issue of today; it is such a necessity that it must be reached for the sake of the present and future of this country.

It was our clear intent that all the work behind the founding of the association be based upon a wide understanding, an agreement beyond all partial interests.”

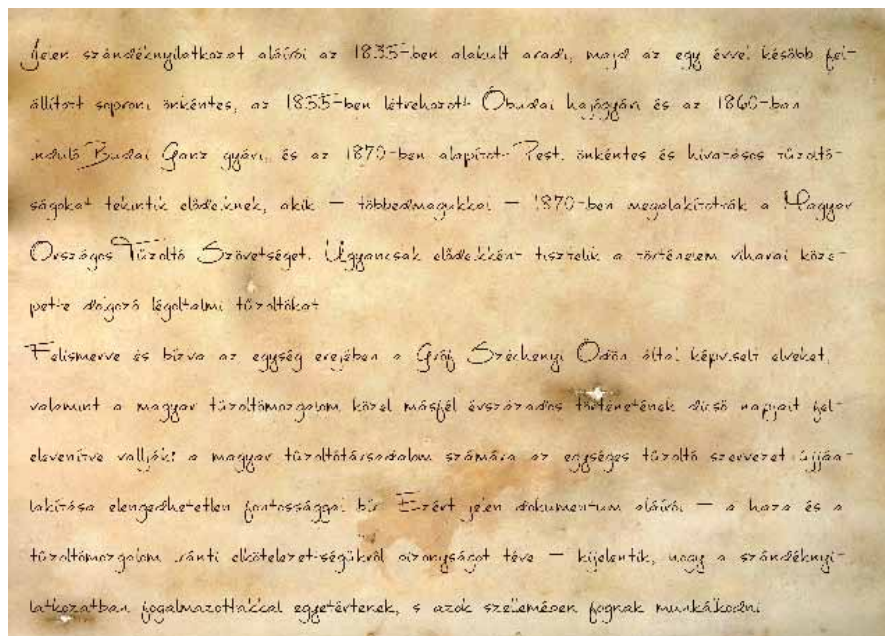
Excerpt from the report of László Gulyás, chairman of the first assembly



Shining brightly again

After the change of regime the firefighter scene has been diversified: a number of new organizations arose (for instance the National Association of Professional Municipality Firefighters in 1991 or the National Association of Industrial and Volunteer Firefighters in 1995). Later, with the split of industrial and municipality firefighters two new organizations were formed. As the years have passed, the scene has become fragmented and HFA lost some of its weight in the process but the plan and the demand was still alive for the restoration of its previous weight and its coherence.

For this reason the milestone of the modern history is the event taken place in Balatonföldvár, on 11 September, 2013 when representatives of the Hungarian Firefighter Association (HFA), the Municipality Firefighter Association (MFA) and the Industrial Firefighter Association (IFA) signed the Memorandum of Understanding, which marked the framework of cooperation.



Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding. From left to right: Sándor Udvardi, chairman of IFA, Tibor Dobson, chairman of HFA, László Balog, chairman of MFA

Goals and tasks

The main goal of the reformed HFA are: unified, national and professional representation, as well as to advocate and improve of firefighting.

We consider as our tasks:

- to promote and improve firefighting in Hungary,
- to promote preventive firefighting and to raise public awareness,
- to build communities, to preserve traditional values and to educate a new generation of firefighters,
- to coordinate professional and academic work,
- to maintain a good relationship with professional groups and NGOs in Hungary and
- to build and maintain good relationships across borders.

Our goal is to strengthen, unify and train Hungarian volunteer firefighters to be helpful partners of career disaster management forces in the improvement of fire prevention and protection.

Our goals connect us to the traditions of days gone by, since they are built on the solid basis of the past. We consider working on Hungarian firefighting coverage and improving the conditions of firefighting and rescue are our main priorities.

Goals and tasks along the main priorities:

- To increase the number of cooperation agreements between career fire services and volunteer firefighters (so that more volunteers can be officially deployed),
- to increase the number of independently deployable volunteer fire brigades,

- to strengthen the role of volunteers in local rescue forces,
- to upgrade the vehicles (rescue or otherwise) of municipality fire services,
- to improve the transport vehicles of volunteer fire brigades and to help them apply for more funds,
- to improve the operating conditions of industrial fire services through legislative work and to help them become an integral part of fire protection and rescue operations,
- to improve education, to introduce e-learning and other modern learning techniques,
- to improve professional and academic work on the field of facility firefighting,
- to educate young generations about volunteering and firefighting.



Nationwide presence

HFA represents a great number of Hungarian firefighters through its industrial, municipality and volunteer firefighter sections.

Firefighters in so-called Volunteer Fire Brigades (VFBs) are cooperating with professional firefighters based on their rating. The categories are:

Category 1

The VFB has a firefighter vehicle with emergency signaling, and its equipment is made of standardized, quality controlled firefighting items.

Category 2

The VFB does not have a vehicle of Category 1, but it has the necessary equipment for the activity.

Category 3

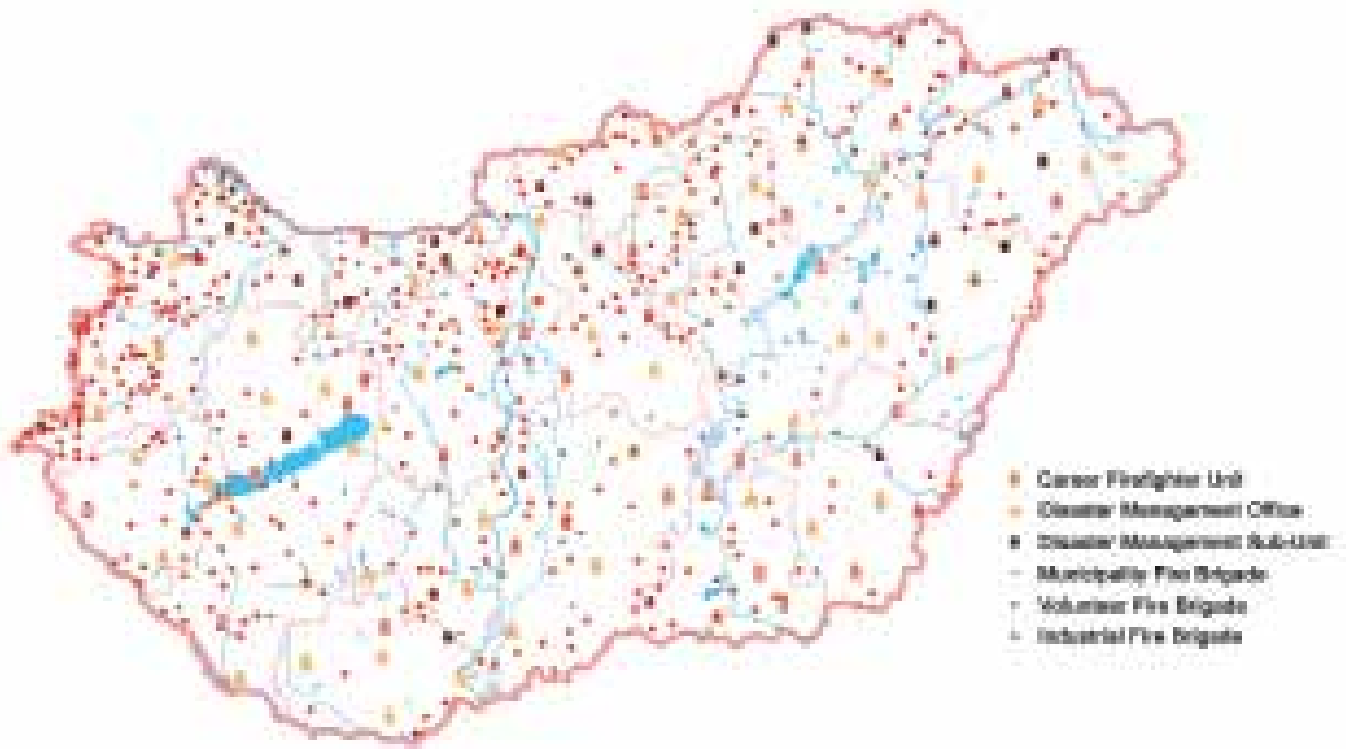
The VFB does not perform any rescue or firefighting tasks, their operation serves educational and tradition-preserving purposes.

With the help of VFBs the "firefighting coverage" of Hungary is complete. VFBs and career firefighters can be co-deployed to any fire (some Cat 1 VFBs also have standalone operational rights), thus

guaranteeing the security of the life and values of the population.

Thanks to the special rescue organizations who just recently joined the HFA, special forms of rescue (eg. rescue at heights), new opportunities present themselves.

Over the course of five years, nearly 67,000 interventions were carried out by our member organizations.



Deployments

Volunteer, municipality and industrial firefighters represented by the HFA are among the best, whether they are deployed to a "simple" road accident or to a large-scale disaster (as was the case during the alumina plant disaster back in 2010, where a shocking amount of red toxic sludge was spilled over a large area).

These firefighters – working alongside career firemen – give everything to help people in need. No matter the race, gender, age or religion – everyone in Hungary is covered in times of need. Even people abroad can expect help without hesitation, since every firefighter knows, that disasters don't just stop at country borders.

HFA helps its members with trainings, donations, professional advice and information in order to enable them to cope with every situation.

As the slogan of firefighters says: „One for all, and all for one”.





Training and competitions

HFA provides firefighters with the opportunity to acquire new skills during theoretical and practical training, and to test their skills and abilities during various competitive events. The association organizes or takes part in organizing various national and international competitions every year, and helps firefighters prepare accordingly.

Trainings for individual skills, development for technical preparedness, competitions for team spirit – this is how it's done for a perfect harmony.



Help across borders

We all know: disasters and need don't know borders or any boundaries. And while providing help to neighbouring countries is the duty of any European nation, this may not be enough.

That is why HFA is determined to provide volunteer firefighters in other countries the means and the knowhow to help themselves, and to help the citizens they are sworn to defend, irrespective of their nationalities.

We believe, that with the help of already organized trainings (with the participation of various Austrian, Croatian, Czech, Romanian, Serbian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Ukrainian volunteers) and through future experience transfers and meetings we can learn valuable lessons from each other.



By the numbers

	Number	Staff	Vehicles	Deployments in 2018
Volunteer Fire Brigades	767	25 383	226	5582
Municipality Fire Brigades	60	1072 (646 full-time, 426 volunteer)	187 (129 firefighter vehicles, 26 special vehicles, 32 other)	7190
Facility Fire Departments	67 (13 full-time, 54 part-time)	2285 (563 full-time, 1722 part-time)	138 (60 ff. vehicles, 70 other)	720

More than half (53%) of VFB members are deployable firefighters.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Municipality Fire Brigades	6492	6097	6798	9154	7190
Volunteer Fire Brigades	3903	3923	4746	8424	5582
Facility Fire Departments	525	742	737	1711	720
total	10 920	10 762	12 281	19 289	13 492

Deployments



Development

Member organizations of HFA can get the necessary equipment and the sources from tenders, donations and cooperation agreements. HFA has a coordinator role in these, the association actively searches for potential partners.

Member organizations of HFA successfully participated in

- various tenders of the National Cooperation Fund;
- tenders of EU;
- several tenders of Hankook;

Realized by the cooperation of HFA:

- agreement with the Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists in 2017;
- MOL-support (fuel cards for 2 million HUF),
- transport of professional equipment (120 tons) from France and distribution of it on demand in 2018.

Beside the above HFA cooperating with the National Directorate General for Disaster Management, Ministry of the Interior, realizes a tender for functioning costs each year.



Past & future in perfect harmony

Holidays (such as the Day of St. Florian and honoring the memory of heroes from the past) have been reinvigorated, the preserving of traditional values is successful through various activities (information brochures, renovation of old-timer firefighter vehicles, collection of memorabilia etc.). And while looking forward, we never forget to remember and honor the firefighters who gave their lives in the line of duty.

The spirit of competition appears in the fact that the renovated equipment can be seen on more and more prestigious competitions. Our teams are competing in races (held on the base of national and international rules) requiring strong teamwork and good performance.

The future is also represented by advancement study courses, applications, technical development funding by HFA for the represented firefighters.

HFA is a founding member of CTIF and is currently most active in fire prevention, education and training, hazardous materials, volunteer firefighters, international contest and in young leaders' commissions.



