

# *Hungarian Firefighter Association*



*Unbroken since 145 years*  
*Hungarian Firefighter Association*  
1870-2015





# Dear Reader!



145 years have passed since the "godfather" of Hungarian firefighting, Count Ödön Széchenyi (son to Count István Széchenyi, revered as "the Greatest Hungarian" in Hungary) helped establish the Hungarian Firefighter Association. Nearly one and a half century has passed, bringing several important chapters of Hungarian history.

Hungarian Firefighter Association today has a living connection with the association established in 1870, and with the spirit of those Hungarian volunteer firefighters,

who have been protecting the lives and properties of their fellow Hungarians without hesitation and compensation.

We firmly believe that all the self-sacrifice, all the heroism and outstanding achievements are meant to be presented worthily.

Especially so, since its very history features important connections not only to Hungarian, but to European history as well. This publication intends to do just that – it gives a glimpse into the development of volunteer firefighting in Hungary. It is also our intention that this publication will serve as a monument of the selflessness of volunteer firefighters – not only in Hungary, but in neighbouring countries as well. They are the heroes fighting the odds and protecting the lives of their fellow citizens – and are unbroken by the hardships of many decades.

The Hungarian Firefighter Association embodies the story itself: the association, having encountered as many hardships as these men, is still very much alive, constantly evolving and striving into one definitive direction: forward.

We have our mind set to become the single most important association of volunteer, industrial and municipal firefighters in Hungary – true to the nature of almost one and a half century.

Budapest, 26 October 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Tibor Dobson".

Tibor Dobson

chairman  
Hungarian  
Firefighter 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 Christians, was detained for doing so. He bravely declared himself a Christian, and had not denied his faith even during torture. His legend says that, when threatened to be burned at the stake, he only answered:

„Flames will carry me to heaven.“

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.

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“.



# Rallied under one banner



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)

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 19<sup>th</sup>-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



„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

Count Ödön Széchenyi



*„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.”*  
(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 of such an association.

He started petitioning the Home Office in 1869 already, 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.



Count Ödön Széchenyi  
(in the middle, with sword)

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.*



Budapest, 1870

# 75 years of history

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 Hungarian firefighting movement:

- establishing and maintaining of professional fire services,
- maintaining, supplementing fire equipment,
- establishing firefighting authorities,
- payment 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.



A volunteer firefighter from Tab, in clothing reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian uniform



19<sup>th</sup>-century breathing apparatus (Central Museum of Hungarian Disaster Management)

## General assemblies of HNFA

- Budapest, 16-19. 09. 1871.
- Sopron, 5-8. 09. 1874.
- Arad, 25-29. 08. 1876.
- Igló, 21-22. 07. 1878.
- Pozsony, 19-22. 08. 1880.
- Zalaegerszeg, 08. 11-15. 1882.
- Selmebánya, 17-19. 08. 1884.
- Fiume, 18-19. 1887.
- Székesfehérvár, 19-22. 08. 1889.
- Sopron, 14-16. 08. 1891.
- Szabadka, 12-16. 08. 1893.
- Kolozsvár, 17-20. 08. 1895.
- Budapest, 15-17. 08. 1896.
- Brassó, 12-15. 08. 1899.
- Eger, 14-17. 08. 1902.
- Szeged, 13-15. 08. 1905.
- Szatmárnémeti, 14-16. 08. 1908.
- Veszprém, 3-5. 07. 1911.
- Budapest, 6. 11. 1920.
- Budapest, 9. 9. 1923.
- Sopron, 20-22. 08. 1926.
- Szombathely, 16-18. 08. 1929.
- Győr, 18. 01. 1931.
- Győr, 13-16. 08. 1932.
- Gyöngyös, 17-19. 08. 1935.
- Budapest, 8-9. 05. 1937.
- Budapest, 8. 12. 1943.

# And the story goes on...

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

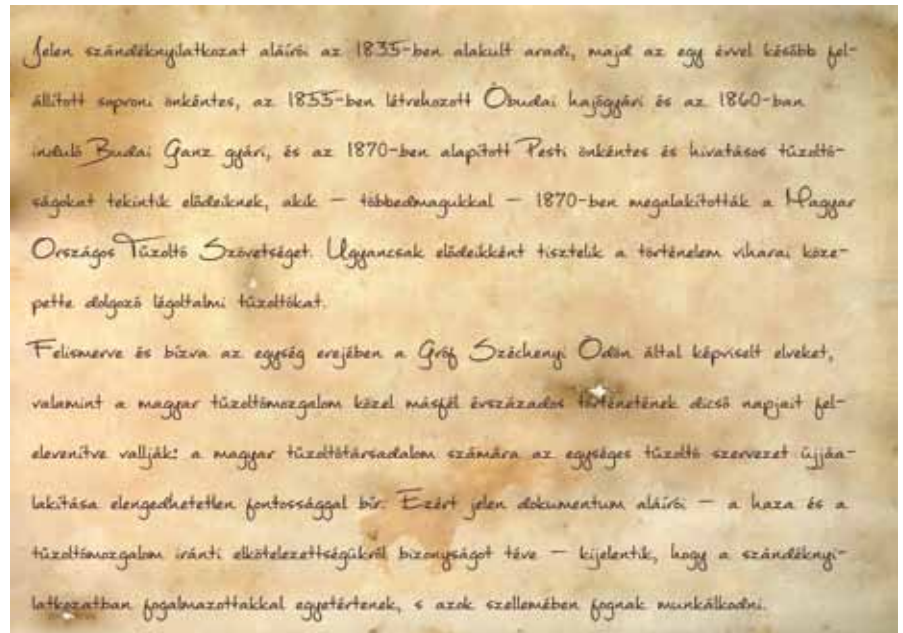




# ...after 145 years, with some twists

The nineties stirred up and diversified the firefighter scene: 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.

The restoration of the national association to its former unified state is a decade-old idea, and it only became possible 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 beginning of cooperation and the birth of a new, unified representation of firefighters across Hungary.



Memorandum of Understanding (in Hungarian)



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 is to advocate and improve of firefighting in Hungary.

## **The tasks of HFA are:**

- 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 fire prevention and protection. Our tasks 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 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 rated based on their training, readiness and equipment. They can be co-deployed alongside professional fire services to a various degree (meaning there are certain circumstances only the highest rated VFBs can be deployed) according to their category.

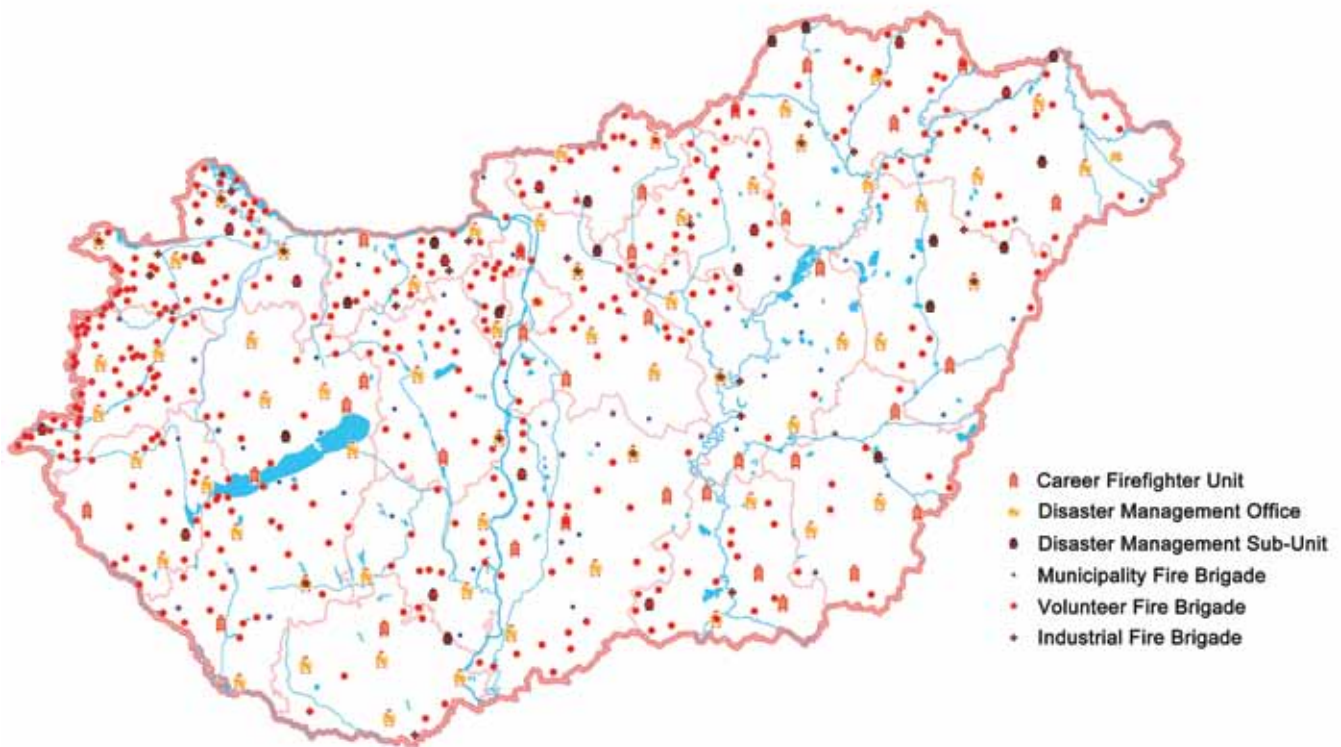
The categories are:

- Category 1  
The VFB has a firefighter vehicle with emergency signalling, and its equipment is made of standardized, quality controlled firefighting items.
- Category 2  
The VFB has a vehicle which can also be used to perform a number of firefighting tasks, and its equipment is made of non-standardized and non-quality controlled items (but they are fit to perform firefighting tasks).
- Category 3  
The VFB has no vehicle that fits into either one of the former

categories, and their equipment is made of similar items described in Category 2.

- Category 4  
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 (Cat 1 VFBs also have standalone operational rights).



# 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 professional 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.





# *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.

HFA 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.



# 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”



## Volunteer Fire Brigades

- registered VFBs: 767
- deployable to firefighting or rescue operations: 600
- in cooperation agreement with a career fire department: 520
- with standalone deployment rights: 24
- volunteer firefighters total headcount: 25 383
- vehicles altogether: 513



## Municipality Fire Brigades

- MFBs in total: 60
- settlements in Hungary protected by Municipality Fire Brigades: 538
- people in Hungary protected by MFBs (million): 1,5
- municipality firefighters total headcount: 1276
- vehicles altogether: 187



## Industrial Fire Brigades

- facilities in Hungary protected by Industrial Fire Brigades: 66
- settlements in Hungary protected by Industrial Fire Brigades: 12
- industrial firefighters total headcount: 2285
- vehicles altogether: 138

## Goals of HFA

- To protect 3.767 million people (38%) in a total of 2610 settlements.



## Volunteer rescue organizations

The firefighters in member associations of HFA are doing disaster relief work in 175 local, 12 district, 20 county and one national rescue organizations altogether.

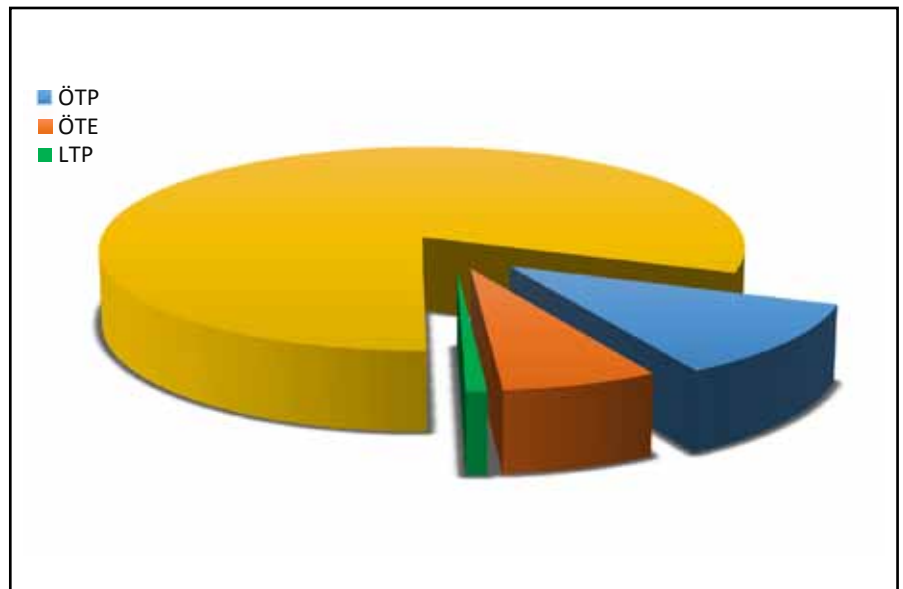
The UN INSARAG certified *Hungarian National Organisation For Rescue Services* can also be quickly deployed at international missions.

At the 2013 Danube flood 150 VFBs (with a total headcount of 3500 volunteers) "contributed" 60,000 working hours and made a tremendous effort in preparations and damage mitigations.

## Deployments

In 2015, there were altogether 59,000 deployments at various emergency situations in Hungary. HFA member organizations took part in 11,000 (approx. half of those were standalone deployments while the in other cases volunteers worked together with career firefighters).

Among the HFA member organizations, municipality firefighters have the highest deployment ratio with 11% of the total cases.



Deployment ratio. Legend in Hungarian, the meanings of abbreviations are as follows:  
ÖTP (Municipality Fire Brigades): 11,34%  
ÖTE (Volunteer Fire Brigades): 6,82%, LTP (Industrial Fire Brigades): 0,92%

# Past & future in perfect harmony

Holidays such as the Day of St. Florian have been reinvigorated, the preserving of traditional values is successful through various activities (information brochures, restoration of oldtimer 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.

Past and future are in perfect harmony: the race is on both in restoration and at national and international yearly competitions such as the „Toughest Firefighter Alive”, an intricate, extremely demanding obstacle course, on which László Bodó jr. won the national gold medal in 2015.

Moreover, the future is also represented by advancement study courses, applications, development funding by HFA for volunteers.

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

Hungary was represented by a delegation of 31 people at the XX. International Youth Fire Fighters Gathering held between 19-26. July 2015 in Opole, Poland.





