

THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF COL. MICHAEL KOVATS

H 9554

The SPEAKER *pro tempore* (Mr. McFALL). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nev. Jersey (Mr. PATTEN) is recognized for 30 minutes.

Mr. PATTEN. Mr. Speaker, it is in the spirit of the coming Bicentennial that I rise with my distinguished colleagues to remember the 250th anniversary of the birth of the American Hungarian hero of the Revolutionary War, Col. Michael Kovats, who has contributed greatly and participated in the battles of our War of Independence.

Col. Michael Kovats was born in 1724 at Karcag, Hungary. At 20 years of age, he was already an ensign in one of Empress Maria Theresa's cavalry regiments and fought meritoriously in the First Silesian War. After the Peace of Dresden in 1745 his regiment was disbanded and he entered the service of the great Prussian King, Frederick II. The Prussians realized the importance of the Hungarian-type light cavalry and the Hungarian colonel, Michael Székely became commander of the Prussian Hussar regiment. Kovats served in this regiment distinguishing himself during the Seven Years War and rose to captain in the Prussian Army. He left the Prussian service in 1761 in protest of Frederick II's practices to exploit the population of occupied areas and to suppress them.

He visited Poland establishing contacts with nationalist circles and then returned to Hungary. In spite of the proclaimed amnesty, he was court-martialed; but, the highest Austrian Military Court and the Imperial Council acquitted him and Empress Maria Theresa pardoned him and gave him the rank of major of cavalry. He married a Hungarian noblewoman, but upon the death of their son, the couple separated. In 1773 he visited Saxony where he heard of the conflict between Britain and the American Colonies. Upon his return to Hungary, he applied for a passport and in 1776 left his country for France to embark for America.

He wrote to Benjamin Franklin in Paris for a letter of recommendation. The original of this classic letter may be found in the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia. The letter follows:

Golden freedom cannot be purchased with yellow gold. I, who have the honor to present this letter to Your Excellency, am also following the call of the Fathers of the Land

H 9552

as the pioneers of freedom always did. I am a free man and a Hungarian. I was trained in the Royal Prussian Army and raised from the lowest rank to the dignity of a captain of the Hussars, not so much by luck and the mercy of chance, than by most diligent self-discipline and the virtues of my arms. The officers and the bloodshed of a great many campaigns taught me how to mould a soldier and, when made, how to arm him and let him defend the dearest of the lands for his ability under any conditions and circumstances of war.

I am here now of my own free will, having taken all the horrible hardships and bothers of this journey. I beg Your Excellency to grant me a passport and a letter of recommendation to the most benevolent Congress.

At last, waiting for your gracious answer, I have no wish greater than to leave soon, to be there where I am needed most, to serve and die in everlasting obedience. Faithful unto death (*Fidelissimus ad mortem*).

Michael Kovats did not receive the recommendation personally, although the recommendation was forwarded by Franklin to the Continental Congress, and Kovats left for the United States where he arrived in 1777.

It is more than just a matter of speculation as to what his plans were. He was a specialist in the training of light cavalry, the Hussars. He knew that General Washington had no cavalry in the professional sense. The four "mounted" regiments of Colonels Moylan, Bland, Baylor and Sheldon were little more than mounted infantry without the necessary training.

Kovats was aware that 15 of Frederick II's battles were won by his cavalry. Training was the secret of Frederick II's success and Kovats was trained by Frederick. Organization was Kovats' function in fighting for Frederick and he wanted to use these talents now to train the colonists.

He immediately became a recruiting officer of the Philadelphia German regiment, and soon met Count Casimir Pulaski who was known to him in Poland and Hungary. Pulaski offered his fortune and fiery zeal for the cause of the Colonies. By July 1777 he arrived in Boston and fought and distinguished himself at Brandywine. On September 15, 1777, Pulaski was appointed a brigadier general and commander-in-chief of Washington's cavalry. Kovats now joined

Pulaski's headquarters and received the assignment of "master of exercises" even before official sanction arrived from General Washington on January 14, 1778. Both Pulaski and Kovats encountered a certain distrust of the British-trained General Washington toward any cavalry. In addition, the small numbers and inadequate equipment of the army at Valley Forge made Pulaski's and Kovats' plan appear unrealistic.

In March 1778 Pulaski resigned, but 8 days later the Continental Congress authorized the creation of what was later known as the Pulaski Legion, an independent cavalry corps. A week later Washington recommended Kovats for the colonelcy and Congress approved. Pulaski served as the overall chief with Kovats as the commanding colonel.

The legion enlisted 320 men, no small accomplishment at a time when the Army numbered around 4,000 men. Ko-

vats trained his troops in New Jersey during the summer of 1778 with headquarters at Princeton. He participated in two battles against the British at Osborne Island and Egg Harbor. With the approach of the winter the legion was ordered from Trenton to Sussex Court House and on November 10 to Cole's Fort where it stayed until February 2, 1779. Then the legion was ordered to Charleston, S.C., to assist Gen. Benjamin Lincoln.

In little more than 3 months he fell in Charleston, S.C. But his life, struggle and death remain one of the saddest memories among revolutionary heroes. They came from the elites of many nations, just as Americans came from many lands during our 200-year history. Americans of Hungarian descent are justifiably proud of this fine soldier-hero of the 18th century who offered, because of his high ideals, his sword and finally his life for the cause of freedom in America and in doing so, for the freedom of all mankind.

We celebrate not only the valiant Hungarian Hussar fighting for American freedom but also the man who, amid the many battles and historical twists and turns of the 18th century, preserved in himself a devotion and commitment to the cause of freedom and human dignity.

The American Hungarian Federation, which devoted its time and energy to bring to the attention of the American people the memory of a brave fighter for American freedom, worked for a congressional resolution in 1955 declaring the anniversary of Kovats' death as Col. Michael Kovats Day.

The federation is led by the able chairman of the board, Rt. Rev. Zoltan Beky, D.D., who for 35 years served as pastor of the Free Hungarian Reformed Church in Trenton, N.J., and afterwards, 7 years as bishop of the same church. I also owe my appreciation to Dr. Elemer Bako and Dr. Z. Michael Szaz who provided a wealth of information on the life of Colonel deKovats after great study.

Mr. HOWARD, Mr. Speaker, this is the 250th anniversary of the birth of the brave colonel of the Revolutionary War, the organizer of Washington's cavalry, Michael Kovats.

Kovats, the commanding colonel of the Pulaski Legion, a great collaborator of Count Casimir Pulaski, was Hungarian of birth. He served in the two best cavalries of Europe, the Austrian Army of Empress Maria Theresa and the Prussian Army of Frederick the Great.

At 52 years of age, he offered his services to the United Colonies and embarked for America from Bordeaux. His military career in the United States brought him in 1778 to New Jersey after having organized his independent cavalry unit consisting of four companies. At the end of the summer the Legion was ordered to Princeton, N.J. He fought the British on two occasions; on September 10 at Osborne Island, where his casualties were 23 men, and at Egg Harbor on the 14th of September. The latter was a defeat because of the treachery of an originally English officer who was not recruited by the Legion, but assigned to it by the

Board of War. The Legion lost 30 men. In October of 1778, the Legion was sent to Trenton and then to Sussex Courthouse. On November 10 they moved to Cole's Fort. But in February 1779, they were ordered first to Virginia and then to South Carolina.

Many of the recruits of the Legion came from New Jersey, especially as the losses of the two battles had to be replaced by new recruits before departing to South Carolina to help General Lincoln.

Colonel Kovats was an officer well-trained in organizing light cavalry. His original Hungarian Hussar training taught him an elan and tactics which made the name Hussar world-famous in the 18th century. His long service and training in the Prussian army, however, also imbued him with the methodological training methods of the best drilled and most professional army of Europe and these dual qualities in him predestined him to become the founder of American cavalry. Unfortunately, his early death and the subsequent death of Count Casimir Pulaski, the overall commander of the Legion, at Savannah in 1779, ended the short-lived experiment for several decades.



We remember the valiant Hungarian officer whose motto in his American service was: "Faithful unto death!" as a hero of the emerging American Nation, and a man who lived and fought in New Jersey in 1778. He teaches us that the devotion to freedom and human dignity was eminently present in the sons of many European nations who offered their swords and their lives so that the American Nation may be born in freedom and retain its democratic traditions. Americans of Hungarian descent may be very proud of the man who blazed their trail in American history and the same commitment to freedom and democracy was the hallmark of American Hungarians in our history and society during the 188 years of our Republic.

Mr. MINSHALL of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Col. Michael Kovats, who came from Hungary in 1777 to fight for the cause of the colonists against the British.

Kovats' military career in Europe was distinguished. As a young officer he fought in the Empress Maria Theresa's Hussar regiment in the Second Silesian War. Later he became a captain of the Gersdorf Free Hussars of Frederick II under whom he had fought in the Seven Years' War. At the time he left Hungary to go to America he was a reserve major of the cavalry by appointment of the Empress.

Kovats offered his services to Benjamin Franklin in Paris in a letter in which he promised to be "faithful unto death" to the cause of the Colonies, a promise he was to keep. A copy of Franklin's letter of recommendation of Kovats was sent to the Continental Congress. It is preserved in the National Archives.

Upon arriving in this country, he met Count Casimir Pulaski. After some difficulties in persuading General Washington to accept their ambitious plans for

September 25, 1974

cavalry training and regiments, General Washington and the Continental Congress established the independent cavalry, later known as the Pulaski Legion, with Pulaski as chief and Kovats as his commanding colonel.

Kovats wanted to bring the clan of the Hungarian Hussars and the meticulous, precise Prussian training of cavalry to the colonists' cause.

Despite the relative ignorance of the Colonies in regard to cavalry fighting and tactics, Kovats drew an enthusiastic response. He exceeded his recruitment quota by 62 men, adding close to 400 cavalymen to the Army of the Continental Congress under General Washington. When winter weather and smallpox decimated his troops as did two battles in the fall of 1778 at Osborne Island and Egg Harbor, he found willing recruits to replace them.

The Legion under Kovats had to travel much as in the winter of 1778-79 General Washington sent it to help General Lincoln against the British General Prevost who was trying to wrest the Southern States from the colonists. Kovats' legion traveled from Cole's Point to Charleston, S.C., during the winter months and contemporary documents show that they did not commandeer their food and other necessities but paid for them in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. At Salem the dreaded smallpox epidemics started, and by the time they arrived at Charleston their effective strength fell to 120 men. But Kovats immediately attacked the British in order to cause a diversion and raise the morale of the people of the beleaguered port city. He succeeded in the attack, but fell in the battle on May 11, 1779 ending a life rich in independent spirit, love of freedom and soldierly virtues. American Hungarians can look with pride upon this soldier who had become the hero of two nations, the Hungarian and the American.

Mr. ADDABBO. Mr. Speaker, on this 250th anniversary of the American Hungarian hero of the War of Independence, Col. Michael Kovats, I am joining my colleagues in remembering his character and accomplishments during his short, but eventful stay in the United States between 1777 and 1779.

A distinguished cavalry officer of Empress Maria Theresa and King Frederick the Great of Prussia, this man offered his sword to the cause of American freedom in 1777. Despite the perils and inconveniences of the journey, he traveled on his own from Budapest to Bordeaux that year via Geneva and wrote to Benjamin Franklin asking him for a letter of recommendation which Franklin sent to the Continental Congress, but not before the impatient and enthusiastic Kovats already had embarked for America. He was stated in 1777-78 mostly in New Jersey, close to British occupied New York City. He recruited his men not only from New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but also from the unoccupied areas of New York State.

In April 1778 he was appointed as commanding colonel of the independent cavalry unit, known as the Pulaski Legion, as its overall commander was the Polish American hero, Count Casimir Pulaski.

Aware that Frederick the Great won most of his battles by the use of cavalry, especially the Hungarian-type light cavalry, the Hussars, Kovats tried to train his troops as Hussar units. His greatest praise was given by the British major who lost the battle in which Kovats fell at Charleston. He reported that Kovats' cavalry was the best cavalry that "the Rebels ever had." More important for our times than the organizational and martial talents of Colonel Kovats were his character and ideals.

Here was a man who was battle-trained and battle-weary, and already 53 years old. He still had the idealism and enthusiasm to take up arms in a far away country for which he considered to be the cause of freedom. It is not money which drew him to the cause. In his letter to Franklin he stated this clearly:

Golden freedom cannot be purchased with yellow gold.

He had wanted to train the troops in precise military manner so that they may "defend the dearest of the lands with their best ability under any conditions and developments of the war." And he ends with the memorable phrase: "Faithful unto death" which in the 20th century became the motto of the American Hungarian Federation as well.

Today we recall the memory of this man of spirit and talent who contributed with his sword and life to the independence of our country displaying the virtues which most of his fellow countrymen who followed him to America had exhibited during the last 198 years.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Mr. Speaker, today Americans of Hungarian descent are proudly commemorating the 250th anniversary of the birth of the American Hungarian hero of the Revolutionary War, Col. Michael Kovats.

We Pennsylvanians are particularly proud of Colonel Kovats because of his recruitment and other military activities in our State.

Early in the summer of 1777, two cavalry officers, Count Casimir Pulaski, of Poland, and Col. Michael Kovats, of Hungary, arrived in Philadelphia, and presented themselves offering their services. Pulaski had a formal agreement with Silas Deane, then Ambassador of the United States to France, guaranteeing for him a commission as Commander of the U.S. cavalry forces, with the rank of brigadier general. As he arrived, General Washington, although not too enthusiastic, honored the agreement made in faraway Paris, and wrote to Congress suggesting that Pulaski be given "the command of the horse." In the interim, Washington invited Pulaski to serve on his staff as a volunteer officer.

About the whereabouts of Colonel Kovats, the Hungarian, the news is less conclusive in the summer months. There is a source which mentions that he served as a recruiting officer for the Pennsylvania German battalion in the summer. The next time his name is mentioned is in the Moravian diary of Nazareth, Pa., in September that "the famous Prussian Hussar officer Colonel Kovatsch" visited there, referring also to the circumstance that he had lived, "quietly," in this country for some time already.

H 9553

The commission of brigadier general in command of all the cavalry of the American Forces, given by Congress to Count Pulaski on September 5, was reinforced by the personal bravery and usefulness of Pulaski as demonstrated in the battle at Brandywine on September 11, when he virtually saved George Washington's life by detecting in time a British detachment near the position of Washington.

During the fall months Pulaski and Kovats, a veteran of 15 battles in the service of Frederick of Prussia, met and discussed the impending problems of cavalry organization and training in the new American republic. Pulaski, Kovats' junior by 24 years, readily admitted that Kovats was the only expert of light cavalry training in America, praising him on four different occasions in his letters, reports and proposals to General Washington.

Finally, on January 14, 1778, Pulaski received Washington's approval of the appointment of Kovats as "master of exercise" for a few months.

The records of the Continental Congress, the Board of War, and the dispatches of General Washington from his headquarters at Valley Forge are filled during the following months with references to increasing difficulties of Pulaski with various officers at Washington's headquarters or in the cavalry units. At that time there were only four, heavily undermanned cavalry regiments, under the command of Colonels Moylan, Bland, Baylor, and Sheldon, mostly of the type of infantry on horseback. The situation was solved by the resignation of Pulaski as commander of the cavalry and his assignment for the organization of an independent unit later called the Pulaski Legion. Soon after, on the 18th of April, Michael Kovats was commissioned by Congress as "colonel commandant of the same unit."



After the British left Philadelphia in the spring of 1778, Pulaski and his officers, including Colonel Kovats, as well as the various cavalry and infantry units of his legion, became more and more conspicuous in Philadelphia. The citizens of Philadelphia, by then a symbol of American liberty and independence, learned to value these well-trained warriors whose martial appearance and precise troop movements were noted in the contemporary press. Their presence did much to enhance the preservation of the recently won independence of the United States.

We Pennsylvanians share the pride of the many Americans of Hungarian descent by pointing to the fine letter by Michael Kovats to Benjamin Franklin dated in Bordeaux, France, on January 13, 1777, in which he offered his life and sword for the cause of American independence. We treasure this beautiful document even among the wealth of the "Benjamin Franklin Papers" preserved at Philadelphia, and we regard it as a fine manifestation of the new American patriotism. "Most faithful unto death,"—wrote Michael Kovats in this letter, and less than 2½ years later sealed his promise by sacrificing his life in the defense of American freedom and

H 9554

independence at faraway Charleston, S.C.

But prior to this ultimate sacrifice, he fought, according to his orders received from General Washington and other superior officers, both the British forces and the various Indian bands which tried to break through the line of defense above Philadelphia. Thus, he contributed, bravely and loyally to the safety and freedom of that great city.

The city of Philadelphia is proud of having given him occasional shelter during these last years of his life. In Germantown, now a part of modern Philadelphia, Colonel Kovats, with reference to his "late expedition against the Indians," submitted his proposals to the Congress "concerning a durable future security against the Indians and other bad fellows." His letter, dated on the 19th of September, 1778, was read in the session of the 31st, and referred by Congress, along with his proposals, to the Board of War.

Now, and in the future, our academic institutions and collections will aid and enhance Hungarian research on the numerous topics related to the historical connections between so many generations of Americans and Hungarians. Certainly one of the most attractive connections is the impressive life story and the shining example of Col. Commandant Michael Kovats, the brave and faithful Hungarian Hussar officer.