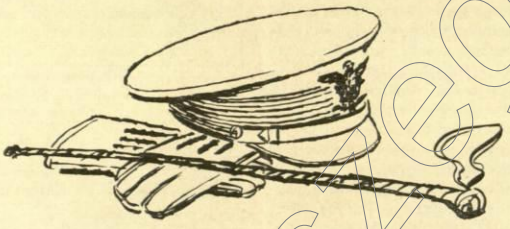
RIDING WHIP DIPLOMACY



HARRY HILL BANDHOLTZ, Brigadier (later Major) General, United States Army. (From the collection of Mrs. H. H. Bandholtz, Constantine, Michigan)

By ANDOR KLAY

Early one morning in the spring of 1949, people passing through Liberty Square in the capital of Communist-ruled Hungary slowed down their steps and stared incredulously toward the building of the American Legation. Something was conspicuously missing from its immediate vicinity. The bronze statue of a man in uniform had vanished from the select spot it had occupied since 1936.

The sturdy figure of Harry Hill Bandholtz, Brigadier General, United States Army, had mysteriously disappeared during the night.

To telephone callers who wisely chose to remain anonymous, a voice from the office of the leading Communist newspaper tersely announced:

"The statue has been removed for repair."

The rejoinder that as recently as the previous day nothing whatever seemed to be wrong with the statue drew a response reflecting the "irresistible logic" and "unshakeable proletarian discipline" of the Party's house organ:

"I repeat, Comrade: the statue has been removed for repair."

A sudden click in the receiver signaled the end of the case at the end of the line. Only someone foolish enough to risk being branded an "enemy of the people" would have pressed the matter further.

But the people of Budapest, retaining their long renowned "akasztófa-humor" ("humor under the gallows") even in the most tragic era of their nation's history of ten turbulent centuries, soon began to wag their sharp tongues—secret police or no secret police.

"Have you heard?" one queried another. "After Rákosi's latest speech, Bandholtz shot his way back to the West!"

A note was found tied to a bush on the Square: "I shall return—with multitudes!"

Invisible hands scrawled "H.H.B.-U.S.A." on pavements of side-streets, across Communist posters on bill-boards, and even on doors—if only rear doors—of offices of the Party itself.

The alleged repair became the longest of its kind on record; after more than five years, the statue is still missing.

Over there, innumerable people still know all about that man Bandholtz. Here, in his homeland, not one person out of millions can recall ever having heard of him. Mention Hungary, and our man on the street will surely call to mind ZsaZsa and the other Gabors; but as to how an American general became the greatest foreign hero of that far-away nation after the collapse of one Communist regime, and why his statue was stealthily removed by minions of another, he has no idea. Only some veterans of our diplomatic and military services who had worked together with Bandholtz remember the days of thirty-five years ago when that self-styled diplomat made irregular but successful diplomatic history on the shore of the not at all blue Danube.

Victors to the Aid of Vanquished

In the summer of 1919, in conjunction with the downfall of the short-lived but sanguinary Hungarian Communist dictatorship of Béla Kun, troops of Rumania—Johnny-come-lately ally of the Entente—entered the capital of war-loser Hungary.

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The Communists collapsed under the combined pressure of passive resistance at home, invasion from abroad, and proscription by the Allied Powers. Lost was their first foreign crucible for world revolution, the testing ground on the crossroads of East and West through which the U.S.S.R. had hoped to extend its frontage as far as the Rhine. Soviet Russia, separated from Hungary by hostile forces, hard pressed by the armies of Kolchak and Denikin from South and East, was in no position to lend direct aid to its Gauleiter in the Danube valley who had received his original instructions directly from the horse's mouth: from Lenin himself. In vain had Lenin declared that the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet "perhaps plays a larger role in history than the Russian Revolution;"[1] the roof caved in over Kun and his lieutenants—among them Rákosi, currently Number One Communist in Hungary—and the Kremlin could do nothing but watch the dramatic spectacle.

A make-shift Social Democratic cabinet took over. It was booted out five days later by a group of nationalists through a ludicrous coup d'état fit more for an operetta than for history. But there was nothing farcical or unreal about the utter exhaustion, hunger and despair of the people which, in a war it had neither caused or desired, had one way or another lost nearly 60 percent of its military forces and was about to be deprived of some 72 percent of its pre-war territory with 64 percent of the total population.

Clemenceau, the old "Tiger," acting on behalf of the Supreme Allied Council, sent a message to the new Government:

"Hungary shall carry out the terms of the Armistice and respect the frontiers traced by the Supreme Council, and we will protect you from the Rumanians who have no authority from us. We are sending forthwith an Inter-Allied Military Mission to superintend the disarmament and to see that the Rumanian troops withdraw."

Four general officers were immediately appointed as principal members of the Mission: Bandholtz of the United States, Gorton of Great Britain, Graziani of France, and Mombelli of Italy. Their task was to attempt the impossible: to create order out of political, economic and moral chaos. They were to direct Hungary's affairs until the shortly expected conclusion of a treaty of peace.

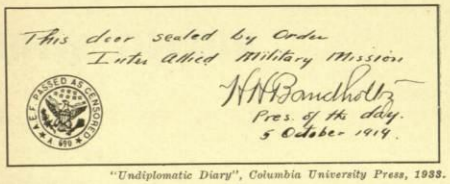
The Americans Arrive

A huge, black automobile, covered with scratches and mud patches, drew up in front of the Hungarian Royal Palace on August 10, 1919. Outside of a military chauffeur, two persons were sitting in the car. One of them, of sharp features but friendly mien, wore a sizeable mustache, an American uniform, a general's insignia, no decorations, and no weapon unless a riding whip be considered one. His companion, hair parted in the middle, round head rising out of a very high and stiff white collar, was dressed in a blue serge suit of obvious American manufacture.

General Bandholtz, late Provost Marshal of the American Expeditionary Force, accompanied by Mr. Herbert Clark Hoover, engineer turned food expert, arrived in the capital of ex-enemy Hungary.[2]

The General expected to stay for a few weeks only; but

[1]Lenin's Address to the Factory Committees and Union Officials in Moscow; *Sochineniia*, 3d ed., XXIV, 261.



"Undiplomatic Diary", Columbia University Press, 1933.

A facsimile of the seal used by General Bandholtz on the National Museum of Hungary.

six hectic months were to pass before his departure. He thought his duties would be mostly of a routine nature; but they turned out to be extraordinary and at times nearly superhuman.

A group of Allied officers received the new arrivals at the foot of the huge marble staircase leading up to the Palace. As all but the chauffeur were walking up the stairs amid animated conversation, English-speaking Hungarian passers-by surrounded the car. One asked, "What sort of man is this General?"

More than three decades have passed since, but no better basic description of Harry Bandholtz has emerged to this date than that which the driver gave to his interrogator: "Strictly a no-nonsense guy . . ."

The General was fifty-five at the time, member of a noted Michigan family of German origin, West Point Class '90, ex-professor of military tactics, veteran of the Santiago and Philippine campaigns. He had been Governor of Tayabas Province in the Philippines, the only regular army officer actually elected to such a position. He had achieved notable success in maintaining law and order in the restive Islands, having destroyed the forces of Simeon Ola and Felizardo

[2]One of Mr. Hoover's assistants when the future President of the United States was chairman of the Allied Economic Council abroad, was a young lawyer from Ohio named Robert A. Taft; another, a former shoe salesman, future Rear Admiral and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Lewis L. Strauss.

The statue of General Bandholtz in Budapest, Hungary (removed by the Communists in 1949).

From the author's collection.

and forced the surrender of large groups of outlaws. After six years as chief of the Constabulary and subsequent service as chief of staff of the 27th New York Division on the Mexican border, he rose in World War I to the post of Provost Marshal of the A.E.F. before receiving the assignment that took him to Hungary. The Commander's Cross of the French Legion of Honor, the Distinguished Service Medal and numerous other high decorations evidenced his timbre.

"An Undiplomatic Diary"

The opening page of an intimate record of events and observations, aptly entitled "An Undiplomatic Diary,"[3] was filled with the General's bold handwriting within less than twenty-four hours after his arrival. His suitcases were still unpacked in two of the least resplendent among the countless rooms of the immense Palace, which Bandholtz had selected to serve as a combination office and living quarters, when an unexpected visitor rushed in, brushing aside the valet (depicted in the Diary as "Lugubrious Luke who comes in like a cloud of gloom, disturbs my rooms, speaks Hungarian, German, and I believe French, fluently and understands absolutely nothing"). The visitor was His Royal Highness the Archduke Joseph, provisional President of what one could have called accurately but not with impunity the Hungarian Royal Republic. The Archduke "came into the room scared nearly to death, holding in his hand what purported to be an ultimatum from the Rumanian Government requiring an answer by six o'clock . . . to the effect that Hungary must yield to all Rumanian demands, giving up all of her war material and supplies of whatever nature, agree to back Rumania in taking away the Bánát country from the Jugo-Slavs, and . . . consent to political union with Rumania, with the King of Rumania as ruler of Hungary, along the same lines as the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy." Bandholtz told him "not to be afraid, and looking at me and trembling he replied: 'I am not afraid, I am a soldier just like you. . .' He asked me what he should do in regard to the ultimatum and was informed that in view of the fact that it had not been presented by the Rumanian Plenipotentiary, he could send word to the sender to go plumb to hell."

The tonic concocted out of diplomatic protocol and common sense immediately "relieved the strain on the Archducal physiognomy to a great extent, and he retired in good order."

The decisiveness displayed was as typical of the General as the language he used in this first of many subsequent encounters with "Archie"—his playfully irreverent name for the Hungarianized senior member of the fallen House of Habsburg.

One crowded week later, of which one would vainly try to offer even a bare outline within this article, "the Rumanians . . . began to loot Hungary, removing all automobiles, locomotives, cars and other rolling stock, took possession of and shipped to Rumania all the arms, ammunitions, and war material they could find, and then proceeded also to clean the country out of private automobiles, farm implements, cattle, horses, clothing, sugar, coal, salt, and in fact everything of value; and even after they were notified by the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference to cease requisitioning, they continued and are still continuing their depredations . . ." At the same time, so-called Hoover kitchens were feeding nearly 100,000 Hungarian children three times a day in Budapest alone. Winter was approaching, a season seldom mild and often exceedingly severe in most parts of the country. Rolling stocks were being rapidly depleted, nearing the point where the available meager produce could no longer be transported out of the provinces. As if anticipating what actually came to pass some three decades later, Bandholtz noted that "intentionally or unintentionally, every move made was in the direction of turning Hungary over to Bolshevism and chaos."

Amid the manifold activities crammed into working days often stretched to 18-20 hours, he observed with growing ire how the looters "were proceeding merrily with their seizure and general raising of hell; all this cannot last indefinitely, and something is sure to pop up before long."

His protests to the Supreme Council as well as to the Rumanians themselves—genuine Bandholtzian remonstrations complete with banging of desks and slamming of doors, —soon became almost daily occurrences. He even traveled to Bucharest to see the King of Rumania who "said that the Rumanians had taken no foodstuffs. As it is bad form to call a king a liar, I simply informed His Majesty that he was badly mistaken; and that I could give him extra facts in regard to thousands of carloads of foodstuffs that had been taken out of Budapest alone . . ."

His concept of his task is summarized in the Diary in unequivocal terms: "Neither my country nor myself had anything to gain; we desired nothing but fair play; America has always sympathized with and endeavored to aid unfortunate nations and people; if I had succeeded in impressing that idea, I had really accomplished my mission." But the policies of the Supreme Council were much less clear, its methods far less direct, and the General often registered considerable chagrin and even outright resentment over its directives. Perhaps the mildest criticism he expressed was this: "The Council sent *another last* ultimatum to the Rumanians" (italics his). The General's uncompromising straightforwardness alone would have made the blunt soldier-diplomat irreplaceable in those days of confusion.

The Great Museum Robbery

As Bandholtz had expected, things indeed began "to pop up before long."

Item: "October 6, 1919. Last night [it was] reported that the Rumanians were at the National Museum with a whole flock of trucks and proposed to take away many of the works of art. At a meeting of the Military Mission on October 1, it was decided that . . . they should have none of these articles until passed upon by our committee . . . On the same date the Rumanian Commander-in-Chief was notified of our decision.

"Accompanied by Colonel Loree and one American soldier," General Bandholtz instantly marched out of the Palace and had himself driven to the Museum. He was armed, as always, with his trusty—riding whip. The stick had already become a sort of magic wand in the eyes of Hungarians who

[3]The Diary, originally not intended for publication, was eventually released by the General's widow as a contribution to a better understanding of America's role in the post-World War I period. Edited by Prof. F. K. Krueger of Wittenberg College, Springfield, O., it was published by Columbia University Press in 1933. Excerpts from it are quoted in this article by permission of the publishers.

1955

looked upon the American as their undoubtedly omnipotent protector.

"We found [the Museum] under a strong Rumanian guard. One man tried to stop us, but it did not do him much good." It is easy to picture the General even now, eyes flashing, "weapon" poised in mid-air. . .

"I had the director deliver the key to the storeroom to me . . . and left a paper worded as follows:

> " 'To whom it may concern: As the Inter-Allied Military Mission is in charge of all the objects in the Hungarian National Museum at Budapest, the key has been taken charge of by the President of the Day, General Bandholtz, the American representative.'

"This was followed by my signature. I then had Colonel Loree place seals on each of the [three] doors, on which it was written:

> " 'This door sealed by Order Inter-Allied Military Mission. H. H. Bandholtz, Pres. of the day. 5 October 1919.'

"As the Rumanians and all other Europeans are fond of rubber-stamp display, and as we had nothing else, we used an American mail censor stamp, with which we marked each of the seals."

At next morning's session the General "related to my colleagues my experience . . . and asked whether or not the Mission approved of the same, knowing in advance that General Gorton was with me . . . I said I personally would take all the responsibility and state that what I had done was done as American representative. At this, General Graziani very gallantly and promptly spoke up and said: 'No, I am with my colleague.' And that settled it. I then telegraphed the American Commission in Paris a statement of what had occurred, and wound up with the sentence: 'In the meantime the seals are on the doors, and we await developments'."

Next day, General Mosoiu, chief of the Rumanian forces in Budapest, invited Bandholtz and his staff to lunch. "Seven of us went over and had an American-Rumanian love feast. At the entrance to the Hotel, they had an honor guard drawn up, with a band which sounded off with what was supposed to be the Star-Spangled Banner. After we had entered the dining room, the band came and repeated what was again supposed to be the Star-Spangled Banner but which was different from the first offense. When we finally left, they sounded off again with the third variety . . ."

General Mosoiu said that General Bandholtz "had put him between the devil and the deep blue sea. His orders were to seize articles in the Museum; he could not seize them without breaking my seals, and he did not dare to break the seals, so all he could see was disaster approaching in large quantities."

A typical "policy move" by the self-trained diplomatist followed:

"General Mosoiu toasted 'Les États-Unis,' which was responded to with raucous Rumanian shouts. In return, I gave them 'the Allies and a lasting friendship,' thereby avoiding a direct allusion to any Greater Rumania"—a smooth trick indeed, motivated by the fact that the drafts of the Trianon Treaty (which was to attach Hungarian Transylvania to Rumania) were not yet in final form.

Amid a nerve-wracking and seemingly endless series of disturbing and sometimes alarming occurrences that kept demanding action through weeks and months to come, Bandholtz briefly noted on October 8 that "the seals on the Museum, by the way, are still intact." They remained affixed until November 15. On that date, the Rumanian troops having left Budapest on the previous day, the General returned to the director of the Museum the key to the storeroom and removed the seals.

On January 2, 1920, "Mr. de Pekár, the former Hungarian Minister of Liaison, insisted on seeing me . . . and gave me one of the medals of the National Museum with a dedication on it ['from the grateful National Museum'] to myself."

The General Leaves—and Returns

Before Bandholtz's departure from Hungary on February 10, 1920, mission accomplished, the Rumanians out of the country, orderly administration restored—the Budapest magistrates decided to have his portrait painted. Noting in the Diary the slight discomfiture of sitting for a portrait, the General remarked that the famous artist assigned to the task ("the old duffer") said to him that "he is putting his soul into the portrait . . . I am curious to see what sort of composite will result from my physiognomy and his soul."

One wonders how the "no-nonsense guy" would have commented on a certain event which took place on August 23, 1936, eleven years after his colorful life came to an end at the old family home in Michigan.

On that date, Bandholtz once again appeared in Budapest: his bronze statue, strikingly true to life down to the riding whip, was unveiled on Liberty Square just across from the building of the American Legation. In attendance were the country's highest public figures, including "Archie;" notabilities from all walks of life; delegates of American Hungarian organizations; also present were vast throngs of those whom the General had loved most of all: the common people, frayed hats in hand, tired eyes glistening with tears as they once again looked up at "our General" and read the inscription engraved in the pedestal:

> "HARRY HILL BANDHOLTZ. In glorious memory of the heroic American General, noble champion of justice, the grateful Hungarian nation. 1919.—'I simply carried out the instructions of my Government as I understood them as an officer and a gentleman of the United States Army.' "

A short streetcar-ride away loomed a monumental edifice with a facade in the style of a Greek temple: the National Museum. In its halls, the historic treasures of the people were safe, thanks to the American.

The General with the magic wand remained on guard until that spring night five years ago when the Communists, with mock thoughtfulness, decided to have it "repaired." A few months after the disappearance of the statue a Soviet memorial was erected in the Square "in honor of the great Stalin."

Since then, the removed figure of the man who in life could not be moved an inch by brute force has been preserved in countless small areas not to be found even on the largest of maps. Doctors say that each is usually the size of the fist of the person in whose chest it is lodged.