



LEUTNANT IN DER RESERVE KARL NEMÉNYI AND FLIK 49

by Juraj Cervenka

All photos published in this article are from Karl Neményi's personal photo album, via the author. In this shot of Karl Neményi you can see the logo of the propeller manufacturer – the Viennese company Knoller-Járay.

The story of the Austro-Hungarian aerial observer Karl Neményi is interesting for several reasons. He claimed two aerial victories, both in the summer of 1918 and at a time when k.u.k. Luftfahrtruppen struggled with increasing technical, material and personnel difficulties. In addition, he was one of the members of Flik 49, which in the last year of the war was actively involved over the battlefield in the area of the River Piave.

An officer of Jewish origin, the son of a prominent lawyer, Viliam Neményi, was born on 22 December 1895 in Košice (now in the Slovak Republic). Karl (in Slovak Karol, in Hungarian Károly) Neményi joined the army voluntarily in 1914, abandoning his studies at the Košice Academy of Law. He was listed as a law student in contemporary military writings and received the rank Leutnant in der Reserve on 1 August 1916.¹ Karl Neményi served from November 1917 as an observer in Flik 49F (later Flik 49D from February 1918). His experience from previous service as an artilleryman made him useful as an artillery observer.² He completed at least 22 combat (operational) flights with this unit, mainly for the purpose of aerial photography, reconnaissance, guiding artillery fire and support of the ground forces.

Flik 49 on the Russian Front

Flik 49 was formed in June 1917 at Strasshof a. d. Nordbahn near Vienna. From July 1917, it bore the designation Flik 49F, the suffix F denoting its primary role of aerial reconnaissance. The unit transferred to its first front-line base at Akna-Szlatina (now Ukrainian Solotvyno).³ On 19 July 1917, the unit lost two to ground fire with the technical officer-observer Leutnant in der Reserve Mathias Krenek and his pilot, Korporal Johann Heinschink, ending up in Russian captivity. However, in the spring of 1918, both returned to Austria-Hungary and re-joined the air force. A few weeks later, observer Leutnant Franz Chlup and Korporal Franz Jellen were captured in Russia when they were shot down during a reconnaissance flight on 19 September 1917. They returned home in March 1918 and also re-joined the air service.⁴

From the beginning, however, the unit's staff struggled with several difficulties. The monthly report of September 1917 listed several pilots as unreliable, with Zugführer Johann Hamater released from the unit, as he acted very nervously during missions, and had caused two accidents.⁵ Archival sources confirm that the arrival of unprepared newcomers for front-line service was one of the most fundamental problems of the whole k.u.k. Luftfahrtruppen, not just Flik 49. These newcomers had to learn quickly on the job, otherwise they would become easy victims for more experienced opponents. Flik 49F remained on the Russian front until January 1918. After the armistice between the Central Powers and Bolshevik Russia, the air forces of the Habsburg Empire gradually moved to the Italian Front. However, in December 1917, Flik 49F aircraft did not take off at all due to a 'ban on combat flights'.⁶

Flik 49 Commanders

Neményi's unit was commanded by two of the Austro-Hungarian Air Service's more interesting characters. Feldpilot Rittmeister Andreas (András) Kammerer was commander of Flik 49 from its formation until September 1918. He was a native of Kastélyosdombó, now located on the Hungarian-Croatian border.⁷ He was wounded in combat on 13 March 1918 and relieved of command duties. He had already had other mishaps. During 1915, he was an observer with Flik 11 and in July 1915 he was transferred to Flik 10 (both units were on the Russian Front), but he left this unit in April 1916 to begin pilot training. From October 1916 he was with Flik 23 on the Italian Front and was brought down on 25 November 1916, probably making an emergency landing without injury to himself, but his observer, Oberleutnant Béla Gantzstuckh von Hammersberg died. From February to May 1917, he commanded Flik 23. After serving in Flik 49, he finally ended his career in the Austro-Hungarian Air Force by taking over Flik 22, a training unit at Strasshof a.d. Nordbahn in October 1918.⁸

At the beginning of December 1917, due to Kammerer's illness, Feldpilot Oberleutnant Georg Altadonna, a native of Trieste, joined Flik 49F as a substitute commander, and