CZECHOSLOVAKIA FOUNDING FATHERS: MILAN RASTISLAV STEFÁNIK

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Milan Rastislav Štefánik (July 21, 1880 – May 4, 1919) was a Slovak astronomer, aviator, military general, and statesman. One of the three founding fathers of Czechoslovakia, he signed the declaration of independence from the Austro-Hungary Empire in October 1918 and served as the first Minister of War.

Figure 1



Štefánik trained as an astronomer and worked for the Paris-Meudon Observatory. His work earned him the Prix Jules Janssen in 1907.

Figure 3



On October 18, 1918, he, along with Tomáš Garrique Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, signed the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, also known as the "Washington Declaration" formally uniting the Bohemian, Moravian, and Slovakian people and lands.

Figure 2



During World War I, he joined the French Army and trained as an aviator. During this time, his work and connections with the French proved invaluable during the discussions of independence.

Figure 4

CZECHO-SLOVAK LEADER KILLED IN THE AIR.

A ROMANTIC FIGURE.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

Deep regret is felt in Paris at the news of the tragic death of General Stefanik, the famous Czecho-Slovak airman and commander, who Czecno-slovak atrinan and commander, who has been killed in an aeroplane accident near Pressburg. He was flying from Italy to Prague with several Italian officers. For some unitary to the commander of the comma known reason the machine suddenly fell from a height of 1,300ft. and all the occupants were killed.

General Stefanik, by birth a Slovak, left Austria-Hungary as a young man to study astronomy in Paris, where he worked for several years in an observatory. He was gifted with extraordinarily keen sight and he applied him-

extraordinarily keen sight and he applied himself to the investigation of the upper currents of the atmosphere, and when flying became possible he qualified as a pilot in order to verify his theoretical conclusions.

On the outbreak of the war he joined the French Air Service and distinguished himself by his skill and intreplitive. He was severely wounded in a fight with a German airman and underwent a severe operation, from which he had scarcely recovered when he voluntered for service on the Serbian front. At the time of the retreat of the Serbian Army he figure of the retreat of the Serbian Army he figure of the retreat of the Serbian Army he figure.

Štefánik served as the first Minister of War until his death. On May 4, 1919, while flying home from Italy, his plane (an Italian Caproni Ca.3) crashed near Bratislava. There were no survivors. The reason for the crash is disputed and remains unclear.

Milan Rastislav Štefánik is buried on Bradlo Hill in Brezová pod Bradlom and is remembered and honored today.

Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 1 Prix Janssen. Image by Hirle. September 2016. Used under CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

Figure 2 Gen. M.R. Štefánik 's Hat. Image by Kiwiev. January 2014. Used under CCo 1.0 license. Artifact located in the Slovak National Museum.

Figure 3 October 1919 map of the Czechoslovak Republic. In the public domain.

Figure 4 Czecho-Slovak Leader Killed In The Air. The Times, 6 May 1919, p. 11.

Figure 5 General M.R. Štefánik. Issued 5 Feb. 1946. 20-Koruna. Purple Brown. SG CZ 462a. Engraved by Jindra Schmidt.

Figure 6 Aviator statue at Stefanik's Observatory on Petrin Hill, Prague, Czech Republic. Photograph by Lubomir.ludvik and used under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

Figure 7 Centenary of death of Milan Štefánik (1880-1919), Souvenir sheet, Issued 3 May 2019, Multicolor.Scott's SK 818.