

## Tibor Sarkady

### Who Was a Freedom Fighter?

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My name is Tibor Sarkady, or if you wish, Sarkady Tibor. I was born in 1936 and as we near the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, I am approaching my 70th birthday.

As I was growing up in Budapest, my Father always told me, “My son, we are here for just a short time, but every human being has a purpose in his or her life. But more importantly, there is a moment in your life, like a shooting star in the sky that represents your moment in history. You might not know it at the time, but by the end of your life you will.”

I now know that October 23rd through early November 1956 was my shooting star moment in history. How young we were – full of life, dreams, ambitions and patriotism.

Yes, I was there, from day one to the very end of the fighting. Yes, I was, and still am a Freedom Fighter.

But, let us stop for a moment. Who was a Freedom Fighter? Yes, I was, with a weapon in my hand (and for this and other reasons, I was sentenced to death by hanging in absente reo in July, 1957).

But, so was that Hungarian policeman who was directing traffic three blocks from the radio station where we were killed by the hundreds on the night of October 23rd when I had nothing to fight with. I went to him with tears in my eyes and said, “What are you doing? Don’t you know we are being slaughtered and here you are with a weapon by your side. What kind of Hungarian are you?” He told me that he was married with two children and couldn’t risk being part of the fighting. So I told him, “If you are not going to use your gun then give it to me!” He looked me in the eyes and said, “Here it is, my son,” and handed me his weapon. He was a Freedom Fighter.

But so was the old lady who gave me a cup of hot chocolate to keep me warm. She was a Freedom Fighter.

Or the gentleman who told us, “Boys, don’t go that way. There are Russians coming.” He was a Freedom Fighter.

Or my friend and schoolmate who died in my place, by virtue of the fact that we had just changed places operating a machine gun ten seconds earlier. He was a Freedom Fighter.

Or the Hungarian tank commander and his crew who refused to kill us on the night of October 23rd, 1956, and paid with their lives for disobeying a direct order. They were all Freedom Fighters.

Or the Ukranian soldiers who were stationed next to the Astoria Hotel with their guns pointing towards the sky saying, “If you don’t shoot us, we won’t shoot you.” They were Freedom Fighters.

Or the citizens of Budapest, who on the evening of November 1st, All Saints Day, lit over 100,000 candles and placed them on every window sill and street corner in memory of fallen heroes and loved ones. I was on patrol that night and it was the most mystical sight I ever beheld. My friends, that night, everyone in the whole city of Budapest and indeed, the entire country, was a Freedom Fighter.

Or the Hungarian border guards who told us which way to go so we could escape. They were Freedom Fighters.

Or later on, after we managed to make it to Vienna, a lady who saw that we had nothing but canvas sneakers on our feet, bought new boots for the three of us and paid for them saying,

"Magyar is free." She was a Freedom Fighter.

Or when, as 4,000 of us were leaving Bremerhaven in January 1957, aboard a troop carrier bound for the US, every ship in port blasted its horn and dock workers stood at attention and saluted as a band played the Hungarian National Anthem. Yes, they too were Freedom Fighters.

Or when during the 12 long miserable days that it took to cross the North Atlantic, with most of us suffering varying degrees of seasickness, that black sailor who came to us every day saying the only Hungarian he knew, "Enni menni" which means "Go to eat." He was my first contact with America and his care and concern was like a warm welcome hug to our new home. Yes, he was a Freedom Fighter.

So, my friends, as you can see, I have been blessed by many whom I choose to call Freedom Fighters, and they have enriched my life, one and all.

Later generations may ask, "Why did you do it?" So much loss of life. 25,000 died. So much sacrifice and destruction. The answer is simple. On that one day, the entire nation, young and old alike, stood together as one and said, "By my God Almighty, we have had enough."

Next year is the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. My wife and I will be there as we are most every year. I will take back the little Hungarian flag that I brought out in 1956. After 50 years, I will place it on the gravesite of my fallen friends and comrades and tell them, "until we meet again."

Isten, áldd meg a Magyarat. God Bless the Magyars.

***Tibor Sarkady***

*Tibor Sarkady, born in 1936, is an electrical engineer and the owner and founder of Elmeco Engineering, a 35 year old company. He has been married to his wife Linda for 42 years and is the proud Father of 3 children - Steven, Darren and Kim - and Grandfather to Amanda and Katie. He currently resides in Rockville, Maryland.*