Between Myth and Reality:  
The Sondermajer (Sondermeier) – Crnjanski duel (1926)

Summary

Tadija Sondermajer (1892–1967) was a French-educated aeronautical engineer of Serbian-Polish origin, former cavalry officer and fighter pilot of the Serbian and French air forces during the First World War. As a fighter pilot of the French Air Force fighter squadron Groupe de Combat “Les Cigognes” (SPA3) he won two victories in the Battle of the Somme. While on mission his SPAD XIII caught fire in the air, and he suffered some severe burns, which sent him to hospital for a long treatment. After the war he left the Army to start his own business in manufacturing aircraft tires and supplying the Royal Air Force with aircraft engines produced in France. Sondermajer was a founding member and vice-president of the Aero Club of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. At the Club meeting of 22 May 1926, Sondermajer had an argument with another club member, Miloš Crnjanski (1893–1977), a well-known Serbian poet, writer and journalist. Sondermajer deemed himself insulted during the argument and challenged Crnjanski to a duel. Duels were quite common in pre-WWI Belgrade. After protracted negotiations between Sondermajer’s and Crnjanski’s seconds, who were changed three times, the duel with pistols took place in the vicinity of Vršac, near the border with Romania, on 26. September 1926. Neither of the duelers was wounded. The paper analyses the background of duelling practice, customs of Belgrade high society, and the political and business circumstances.

Keywords: Tadija Sondermajer (Sondermeier), Miloš Crnjanski, Royal Aero Club, aviation, aircraft manufacturing, officers, pilots, code duello

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