

# MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES



## Loyal Legion Vignettes



### SOME NOTES ON THE LIFE AND CAREER OF MAJOR-GENERAL JULIUS STAHEL



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Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States  
Part 1

By Stephen Beszedits  
[s.beszedits@utoronto.ca](mailto:s.beszedits@utoronto.ca)  
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It is often forgotten that many of the combatants on both sides in the Civil War were men of foreign birth. Although the Germans and the Irish constituted the overwhelming majority of the non-natives, virtually every European nation was represented in the ranks. One of the smaller ethnic groups was the Hungarians; some 300 of them fought in the conflict, predominantly on the Federal side. While today about 1.5 million Americans are of Hungarian descent, the Hungarian population of the United States on the eve of the Civil War was very small; no more than 4,000 according to the most reliable estimates.

Most of the Hungarian participants were political refugees who came to the United States in wake of the unsuccessful 1848-49 War of Liberation against the ruling Hapsburg dynasty. One of the most distinguished of the emigres was Julius Stahel. He not only attained the highest rank, that of major-general, but was also the only Hungarian to win the coveted Congressional Medal of Honor.

Stahel landed in the United States in 1856. Like many other newcomers, he settled in New York City. To support himself, he took employment in journalism. Working in this field enabled Stahel to familiarize himself with many facets of American life, while his association with the German-American press earned him widespread recognition and respect among the German-speaking population of the city.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Stahel and Ludwig Blenker, a flamboyant German expatriate, organized the 8th New York Volunteer Infantry (also known as the First German Rifles), the first German-American regiment in the Union army. Stahel became the regiment's lieutenant-colonel and Blenker its colonel. Playing a most prominent role in raising and equipping the unit was August Belmont, a wealthy banker born in Germany.

Like other volunteer troops, the 8th New York drilled assiduously and paraded often, much to the delight of the citizenry. When Carl Schurz and his wife came to New York for a visit, Blenker invited them to attend one of his reviews. Blenker never failed to put on a good show and the occasion left an indelible imprint on the Schurzes. Recalled Schurz in his *Reminiscences* written decades after the event: "A fine regimental band struck up as we were conducted by Colonel Blenker, in full uniform, to a little platform erected for the purpose, and the regiment passed before us in parade, . . . This was done, the officers were dismissed by Colonel Blenker with a wave of the hand that could not have been more imperial if Louis XIV himself had performed it. Of all the official functions that it has been my fortune to witness, none was more solemnly ceremonious than this."

Despite his penchant for theatrics and gaudy uniforms, Blenker was a thoroughly brave man, an excellent organizer, a fine horseman, and an efficient commander. His regiment was a model unit.

The 8th New York left the city at the end of May with Blenker making a grand appearance at the head of his troops on a superb horse. Just before their embarkation to Washington, D.C., Belmont presented the regiment with flags and banners in front of City Hall. In a rousing speech he exhorted the men to prove by deeds their loyalty to their adopted land.

Commenting on their departure, the New York *Tribune* said: "Col. Blenker has had a thorough military education, and has served in Greece, . . . He also fought with distinction throughout the German Revolution of 1848. Lieutenant-Colonel Stahel is a Hungarian, . . . He bears the scars of many a hard-contested field upon his person. Several of the captains and subalterns have likewise borne the brunt of actual war, and many of the men are European veterans."

At the First Battle of Bull Run, July 20, 1861, the 8th New York was assigned to the First Brigade of the Fifth Division. With Blenker in command of the brigade, Stahel led the regiment. Since the division constituted the Union army's reserve at Centreville, it was not engaged in the battle proper.

Unlike many of the Union troops, Blenker's men did not disintegrate into a fleeing mob as the Confederates gained the upper hand, but held their ground in perfect formation, covering the retreat to Washington. Commented a contemporary author: "I need not speak much in praise of Blenker and the officers who served him so well. The events speak for them. . . . With three regiments he

stood to fight against an outnumbering enemy already flushed with victory, . . . At eleven o'clock the attack came upon the advance company of Colonel Stah[e]'s Rifles, not in force but from a body of cavalry whose successful passage would have been followed by a full force, and the consequent destruction of our broken host. The rebel cavalry was driven back, and never returned, . . ."

For their valiant conduct on the battlefield, both Stahel and Blenker were promoted; Blenker was advanced to brigadier-general and Stahel became colonel of the 8th New York. Shortly afterwards, on November 12, Stahel received his star as a brigadier-general. Succeeding him as colonel of the regiment was Prince Felix Salm-Salm, one of the many Germans who came to the United States to tender their services for the Union cause.

In the beginning of April 1862 Stahel and the rest of Blenker's division were ordered to General John C. Frémont's Mountain Department. Owing to the distance and the rugged terrain they had to traverse they did not reach Frémont until May 5. Because of the poor flow of supplies along their route, they arrived ragged, shoeless, tentless, without sufficient provisions, and exhausted.

Frémont was directed to assist in the frantic attempt to cut off the retreat of General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson from the strategic Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. On June 8, at Cross Keys, halfway between Harrisonburg and Port Republic, Frémont overtook some of Jackson's troops commanded by General Richard S. Ewell.

Stahel's brigade bore the brunt of the fighting in this battle and sustained severe casualties accordingly. The 8th New York alone lost 46 killed and 135 wounded. Frémont praised Stahel's "cool and effective" leadership on the "hottest part of the field." Reporting on the engagement, the *New York Times* stated: ". . . the part taken by Gen. Stah[e], and his brigade of Germans, is the theme of general commendation. He has won the popular favor among American as well as foreign officers . . . He is brave and enthusiastic, and was seen during the day in the thickest of the fight, encouraging and urging on his men."

Toward the end of June, General John Pope, the hero of the capture of Island Number 10 in the West, was selected by President Abraham Lincoln for the command of a force to be designated the Army of Virginia, and to consist of all the troops then covering Washington or holding the lower end of the Shenandoah Valley. This army was to be composed of three corps, under Generals John C. Frémont, Nathaniel Banks and Irvin McDowell, respectively. However, Frémont, incensed at the appointment of Pope whom he loathed, resigned. Command of his corps was then given to General Franz Sigel. Upon Frémont's resignation Blenker was ordered to Washington, while Stahel and his brigade were assigned to Sigel's First Corps.

Pope was to cover Washington and protect Maryland, defend the Shenandoah Valley as well as threaten Richmond from the north. To inspire his troops, Pope delivered an address, widely considered the most bombastic, egotistic and ill-advised proclamation of the war: "I have come to you from the West, where we have always seen the backs of our enemies; from an Army whose business it has been to seek the adversary and to beat him when he was found; whose policy has been attack and not defense. . . . I am sure you long for an opportunity to win the distinction you are capable of achieving. That opportunity I shall endeavor to give you. . . . Let us look before us, and not behind. Success and glory are in the advance; disaster and shame lurk in the rear. . . . it is safe to

predict that your banners shall be inscribed with many a glorious deed, and that your names will be dear to your countrymen forever."

No address that was ever issued to an army created such a storm of hostile criticism as this did. One brigade commander called it "very windy and somewhat insolent." Among the enlisted men the proclamation became known as "Pope's Bull."

Pope also issued several controversial orders. General Orders No. 5 directed the troops of his command to subsist on the country as far as practicable. General Orders No. 7 provided that non-combatants in the rear of the army would be held responsible in damages for injuries done to the tracks of railroads, attacks on trains, and assaults on soldiers by guerrillas in their neighborhood. General Orders No. 11 stipulated that the oath of allegiance would be tendered to all male citizens in the lines of army, and "if any person having taken the oath of allegiance . . . be found to have violated it, he shall be shot, and his property seized and applied to the public use."

Brimming with confidence and expecting nothing but victories, Pope led his army from northern Virginia southward, targeting the strategic railroad junction at Gordonsville. By the first week of September, he was in full retreat, seeking the safety of the fortifications of Washington.

While Pope's campaign was a disastrous failure, Stahel acquainted himself well. Both Pope and General Robert C. Schenk praised his role in the Second Battle of Bull Run in their official reports.

In wake of various corps reorganizations and reassignments, Stahel assumed temporary command of the Eleventh Corps on December 18, 1862, during the absence of Sigel, and on January 10, 1863, he was named to the command when Sigel assumed command of the divisions comprising the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps.

On January 12, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln wrote to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton:

I intended proposing you this morning, and forgot it, that [Carl] Schurz and Stah[e]l should both be Maj. Genls. Schurz to take Sigel's old corps, and Stah[e]l to command Cavalry. They, together with Sigel, are our sincere friends; and while so much may seem rather large, any thing less is too small. I think it better be done.

Special Orders No. 29, January 19, 1863, assigned Schurz to Sigel's old Corps and Stahel to command cavalry in the newly formed Grand Reserve Division under Sigel.

Under the cover of darkness on March 8, the daring and resourceful John Singleton Mosby, the most famous Civil War guerrilla, at the head of some 30 men slipped through the Union lines at Fairfax Court House, Virginia, and captured Brigadier-General Edwin H. Stoughton, two other officers, 30 enlisted men and 60 horses. The raid mortified both the army and the public. Rumors started to circulate that Lincoln or cabinet members might be the next target.

When informed that Mosby carried off not only General Stoughton but also a number of horses, Lincoln, who possessed a wry sense of humor, remarked: "Well, I'm sorry for that, for I can make brigadier-generals, but I can't make horses."

Lincoln summoned Stahel to the White House and ordered him personally to take charge of the cavalry at Fairfax. He told Stahel in no uncertain terms that the raids upon the lines around Washington must stop. The three brigades of cavalry in the Department of Washington were organized as a division, which together with the outposts lately commanded by General Stoughton were placed under Stahel's command. On March 14, he was elevated to the rank of major-general.

The March 16 issue of the *Washington Star* lauded Stahel's appointment saying that the cavalry stationed around Washington had been handicapped so far by its need for an "experienced and efficient" commander, one who would be on the lookout for "every movement of the small bands of guerrillas and other irregular troops that have alone perpetrated the mischief that has taken place in the course of the last four weeks."

Stahel spent the ensuing months chasing Mosby through the woods, rolling hills, mountain spurs, and winding and unfrequented roads of Loudoun, Fauquier and Fairfax counties. Although he managed to check Mosby, he was no more successful than his predecessors, or his successors, in defeating or capturing the elusive "Gray Ghost."

Mosby's superior skill, courage and good judgment gave him almost uninterrupted success, and invariably saved him from capture. He and his band established a reputation for being invincible by night and invisible by day. Till the end of the war Mosby had everything so much in his own way that the region in which he operated was called "Mosby's Confederacy."

Mosby was fond of saying: "The military value of a partisan's work is not measured by the amount of property destroyed, or the number of men killed or captured, but by the number he keeps watching." Usually his forays were accomplished with from a dozen to 80, a number he preferred because a small party could be concealed or moved about quickly as necessity demanded. "Partisan warfare," wrote John Scott, an officer in the Confederate army, after the war, "until it was systematized and its capacities displayed by the genius and energy of Mosby, had no place among the military arrangements of any nation."

Stahel's most triumphant moment against Mosby came after the latter's attack on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, near Catlett's Station on May 30. Mosby conceived his audacious plan a few weeks earlier. Needing a cannon to disable the locomotive and drive off the guard accompanying the supplies destined for the Union forces on the Rappahannock River, he asked General "Jeb" Stuart for one. Stuart complied and the artillery piece, a 12-pound brass mountain howitzer captured from the Federals at Ball's Bluff in the battle of October 23, 1861, arrived on the 27th. Sam Chapman, formerly of the Dixie Virginia Battery, drilled some of the men in the rudiments of loading and firing the weapon. With the cannon in tow, Mosby and 48 men set off on the 29th. Early next morning they selected a spot for the ambush, cut the telegraph wires, ripped up a section of the rail, and placed the cannon in position.

As the train ran off the tracks, the guerrillas commenced firing. One shell from the howitzer pierced the engine while another shot prompted the infantrymen aboard the train to flee. Quickly rifling through the cars, the partisans took whatever they could carry and then set the train on fire.

The booming of the cannon alerted the nearby cavalry camps and soon the raiders were vigorously chased by horsemen from the 5th New York, 1st Vermont and 7th Michigan regiments. Mosby and his men fought with their customary zeal, but not even a few well-aimed shots from the cannon deterred the pursuing bluecoats. Realizing that it would be impossible to save the howitzer, Mosby resolved to make the Yankees pay for it as dearly as possible. In his own words: "At last our ammunition became exhausted, and we were forced to abandon the gun. We did not abandon it without a struggle, and a fierce hand to hand combat ensued in which, though overpowered by numbers, many of the enemy were made to bite the dust." A slightly wounded Mosby managed to escape but eight of his men and the cannon were captured.

Stahel had the cannon polished and placed in front of his headquarters as a trophy and telegraphed General Samuel Heintzelman: "We whipped him like the devil, and took his artillery. My forces are still pursuing him."

The Northern press naturally played up the incident, praising the courage and determination of the cavalymen while chortling over Mosby's losses. One article concluded that "the Southern Confederacy will not be apt to trust Mr. Mosby with other guns if he cannot take better care of them than he has of this one."

During the march of the Army of the Potomac towards Gettysburg, Stahel's division made a reconnaissance from its headquarters to Warrenton and then returned to Fairfax Court House. Afterwards, Stahel and his troops joined the Army of the Potomac at Frederick, Maryland.

On June 27, a few days before the battle of Gettysburg, General Joseph Hooker relieved Stahel of his command and assigned his division to General Alfred Pleasonton's Cavalry Corps. Stahel was ordered to report to General Darius Couch in the Department of the Susquehanna. There he organized the 20th, 21st and 22nd regiments of Pennsylvania cavalry.

Like other officers stationed in and around Washington, Stahel participated in the vibrant social life of the capital, hobnobbing with prominent political and military figures. On November 11, John Hay, Lincoln's assistant private secretary, wrote in his diary: "In the evening went to the theatre with Ulric Dahlgren Stahel Kent & Kirkland to see Wilkes Booth in Romeo. . . . Finished the evening by a serenade of Miss Chase by the band of the 17th Infantry."

When President Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg Address on November 19 at the dedication of the military cemetery established for those who had fallen at the battle of Gettysburg, Stahel commanded the guard of honor.

On March 13, 1864, Stahel was transferred to the Department of West Virginia where he became Sigel's chief of cavalry and chief of staff. In late April, Sigel marched his army into the northern part of the Shenandoah Valley. He was instructed to destroy a portion of the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railroad, and his movement was expected to keep General Robert E. Lee from withdrawing troops from the Valley, and reinforcing his principal army, the Army of Northern Virginia.

Consolidating Confederate forces in the Valley, General John C. Breckenridge met Sigel's column at

the small town of New Market on May 15. In the ensuing engagement, often called "the biggest little battle of the war," the Confederates scored a resounding victory, enabling the South to maintain control over this agriculturally vital area.

Upon learning of the debacle, General Ulysses S. Grant requested the administration to have Sigel relieved immediately and General David Hunter put in command of his troops. Hunter was ordered to move up the Shenandoah Valley, cross the Blue Ridge Mountains to Charlottesville, and then invest Lynchburg, a center for foundries and factories, hospitals, and rail and canal transportation, and an indispensable source of supplies for Lee's army.

Compared to Sigel, Hunter moved up the Valley with lightning decisiveness and speed. His men foraged savagely from civilians and burned what they did not take. To contest Hunter's movement, Confederates under General William E. "Grumble" Jones met Hunter's army at the village of Piedmont, some seven miles southwest of Port Republic, on June 5.

After repelling two attacks, the Southerners were disastrously beaten by a flank attack, losing 1,500 men and General Jones, who was killed. Stahel played a conspicuous role in the victory. Personally leading some of his dismounted troopers to support the infantry, he was hit by a bullet in the left shoulder. "It . . . struck the bone and glanced off," he recalled decades later, "and the whole of my left arm turned black - probably from the shock of the bullet blow on the bone." He left his command only for the time required to allow his surgeon to dress the wound. With his left arm heavily bandaged and quite useless, Stahel had to be helped onto his horse. Despite the encumbrance and intense pain, he led his mounted men in the decisive charge which routed the Confederates. Twenty-nine years later, on November 4, 1893, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his gallantry in this battle.

Piedmont was the first Union victory in the upper Shenandoah Valley and Hunter was elated. During the celebrations at headquarters that evening, the normally reserved and dour Hunter, flushed with success and overcome with joy, was transformed temporarily. Hunter, wrote Charles G. Halpine, the distinguished journalist serving on his staff as an officer, impulsively "first kissed Sam Stockton (Hunter's nephew and aide-de-camp), then threw his arms around me & kissed me." Stanton sent thanks for the victory, expressing the hope that "led by the courage and guided by the experienced skill of its commander, the Army of the Shenandoah will rival other gallant armies in the successful blow against the rebels."

Due to his wounds, Stahel was temporarily relieved of his command and sent to Martinsburg to gather and forward additional supplies for the march on Lynchburg. Several weeks elapsed before he was able to resume field duties.

Hunter proceeded up the Valley to Lexington. There he burned the buildings of the Virginia Military Institute. He also put to the torch nearby Washington College, the residence of former Virginia governor John Letcher, and other private property. The statue of the First President adorning the campus of Washington College was seized and sent to Wheeling, West Virginia, so as "to rescue it," as one Federal officer explained, "from the degenerate sons of worthy sires."

A fanatic abolitionist despite his origins, the Virginia-born Hunter believed that the South should

pay dearly for its transgressions against the Constitution and the human rights of enslaved blacks. Many fine mansions with all their contents went up in flames along Hunter's path; not even his own relatives were exempt from his destructive proclivities. According to one Southern historian, "he turned the Valley of Virginia, his native State, into a wilderness."

Lee, intent on protecting his supply base, dispatched General Jubal Early and the entire Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia to Lynchburg. Hunter and Early arrived at the city simultaneously on the 17th. On the afternoon of the following day, Hunter, with his cavalry on each wing, his two infantry divisions and his artillery in the center, made an assault on the south side of Lynchburg, but the attack was feeble and easily repulsed. Deciding that the strength of the works and the Confederates assembled were too formidable, Hunter decided to withdraw that very evening under the cover of darkness. Lynchburg remained under Confederate control until the end of the war.

When Early discovered Hunter's movement, he put all his forces in pursuit and pressed the Union rearguard relentlessly. In spite of the prostrating heat, the Confederates made twenty miles a day. Hunter retreated, not by his Shenandoah line, but to Charleston, in the Kanawha Valley. His withdrawal left the Shenandoah devoid of Federal troops. Taking advantage of the situation, Early marched down the Valley, crossed the Potomac River and threatened Washington, D.C. The Northern capital was never in greater peril than at this time. Early's forces, however, were inadequate for an assault on the heavily fortified city. The hundreds of miles of incessant advance left him with only 8,000 infantry, about 40 field-pieces, and 2,000 poorly-mounted cavalry. With Federal reinforcements pouring in, Early was compelled to abandon any thought of a siege. On the 13th of July, he marched to the Potomac, and on the 14th, crossing near Leesburg, was again in Virginia. Nevertheless, his bold action created an important diversion in favor of Lee in the defense of Richmond.

Hunter spent the rest of the war rationalizing his decision to retreat into West Virginia, but he soon lost his command as well as his reputation. When Hunter was relieved of his command by General Philip Sheridan, Stahel was transferred to the Middle Department, and assigned to duty as president of a court martial in Baltimore, Maryland. He resigned his commission on February 8, 1865.

Early in 1866 Stahel was appointed by President Andrew Johnson consul at Yokohama, Japan. There he succeeded in opening additional ports to American trade. Afterwards, he served as consul to Osaka and Hiogo. Among the distinguished visitors to Hiogo in 1879 were Ulysses S. Grant and his wife. Although elaborate preparations had been made to receive the Grants, they were not allowed to land due to a raging cholera epidemic. Instead, Stahel came out to their ship to pay his respects. He remained in Japan until 1884, when he was made consul in Shanghai, China.

Also serving in the diplomatic corps in the Far East during Stahel's tenure was none other than his one-time nemesis, John Singleton Mosby. They became friends and Mosby even recommended Stahel's appointment as Assistant Secretary of State.

Resigning from the consular service in 1885, Stahel returned to New York City. According to one biographical sketch, Stahel "represented his adopted country with dignity, ability and tact."

Subsequently, for a number of years he was an executive with the Equitable Life Assurance Society. At the Hoffman House, his residence for some twenty-five years, he was always simply called "The General." Many of the younger residents, unaware of his illustrious past, thought that the title was purely honorific, bestowed on the basis of his erect military bearing.

In the twilight of his life Stahel made numerous public appearances, some joyous, others sad. He was among the more than one hundred distinguished veterans of the Army of the Potomac who attended the sumptuous dinner on October 20, 1890, at the Plaza Hotel in New York City given in honor of the Comte de Paris, who served on General George B. McClellan's staff during the Civil War. Also present were Abner Doubleday, William A. Hammond, Oliver O. Howard, Fitz-John Porter, Daniel E. Sickles and others with names forever enshrined in the history of the United States.

On Saturday, May 14, 1899, Stahel, along with Carl Schurz, Franz Sigel and many other dignitaries, attended a reception in honor of Princess Agnes Salm-Salm at the Odd Fellows' Hall at 69 East Eighth Street. Included among the guests were 28 surviving veterans of the 8th New York Infantry. Now a widow for nearly 30 years, Prince Felix having fallen in action during the Franco-Prussian War, she brought with her three regimental flags once belonging to her late husband. In presenting these flags to the veterans, she said: "I want you to rally round it once again and keep it with you until the last comrade shall have passed away."

Afterwards Schurz addressed the assemblage as did Stahel. During the elaborate banquet later that evening several toast were made; Stahel's toast was to the health and prosperity of the Princess.

Death took its inevitable toll of friends and old comrades with each passing year and it was his painful duty to attend a never-ending procession of funerals. He was one of the honorary pallbearers at the internment of Carl Schurz in May 1906.

Stahel died of angina pectoris on December 4, 1912 in New York City at the Hotel St. James, his residence during the final months of his life, "in full possession of his faculties," according to his obituary notice in the December 5, 1912 issue of the *New York Times*. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. His honorary pallbearers included several military and civilian notables: General Nelson Miles, Rear-Admiral Adolph Marix, George P. Wilson and Simon Wolf, who delivered the eulogy.

Capsule summaries of Stahel's life and career can be found in most standard biographical reference works and numerous publications dealing with the Civil War. Included among these are *Generals in Blue*, *Biographical Dictionary of the Union*, *Dictionary of American Biography*, *American National Biography*, *The Civil War Dictionary*, *Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography* and *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. In general, however, these sources make only cursory references to his activities before the Civil War and much of what is stated is riddled with errors.

Stahel was born in the city of Szeged, Csongrád County, on November 5, 1825, into a typical middle class family. Like all sons of families having a similar background, he received a thorough education at the local schools.

Moving to Budapest in 1846, he entered the employ of Gusztáv Emich, one of the country's leading printers, publishers and booksellers. Working with Emich gave Stahel the opportunity to meet many notable literary figures, among them Sándor Petőfi, the greatest lyric poet of Hungary. The two young men became friends, and in January 1848 Petőfi even penned a whimsical poem to Stahel, entitled *Egy könyváros emlékkönyvébe* [To a Bookseller's Memorial Book]. (The poem, with a translation, is given at the end of the article.)

At the start of the revolution in the spring of 1848, Stahel immediately joined various patriotic organizations, including the Committee of Public Safety, a group formed to maintain law and order. Enrolling in the army, he rose to the rank of lieutenant and served as an adjutant on the staff of Richard Guyon. The British-born Guyon, a Hungarian citizen by virtue of his marriage to Countess Mária Splényi, was one of the revolutionary army's most charismatic and successful leaders. In the battle of Branyiszkó, February 5, 1849, Stahel sustained serious wounds and was decorated for bravery.

By May 1849 the Hungarian insurgents inflicted a series of decisive defeats upon the Hapsburg Imperial Army and the Croat, Serb, Slovak and Rumanian irregulars supporting the House of Hapsburg. A small Russian army, which made an informal incursion into eastern Hungary to help the hard-pressed Hapsburg troops there, was routed and expelled.

To save his disintegrating realm, Emperor Franz Joseph made a formal appeal to Czar Nicholas I for military assistance. The autocrat of Europe, like the rulers of the "Evil Empire" in 1956, was more than willing to extend a hand in stamping out liberalism and soon a Russian army of some 300,000 poured into Hungary. The revolutionaries felt confident that the Russian invasion would mobilize Western support on their side. But as in 1956, their hopes were cruelly dashed.

British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston did not want an independent Hungary, still less one with a republican government. He regarded the Hapsburg monarchy as the very basis of the Balance of Power on the Continent. Palmerston told Ferenc Pulszky, the Hungarian representative in England, that he regarded the Hapsburg Empire as a European necessity and "if it did not already exist, it would have to be invented." The September 1850 issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* offered a more candid assessment of official British attitude: ". . . the inspection of our exports to Austria during the last twenty years, will demonstrate that there is no state with whom we maintain a more rising and gainful traffic, or whose industry is more completely removed from all rivalry or interference with that of this country."

"I need not tell you," French Foreign Minister Alexis de Tocqueville wrote to one of his colleagues, "with what keen and melancholy interest we follow events in Hungary. Unfortunately, for the present, we can only take a passive part in this question. . . . our distance from the seat of war must impose upon us, in the present state of our affairs and those of Europe, a certain reserve. . . . our duty with regard to the Hungarian events is to limit ourselves to observe carefully what happens and to seek to discover what is likely to take place."

President Zachary Taylor, who considered that the Hungarian War of Liberation as one between "popular rights" and "despotic powers," instructed A. Dudley Mann, an attache of the Paris legation, to proceed to Hungary and determine whether the revolutionary regime was strong enough to stand.

"If Hungary sustains herself in this unequal contest," Secretary of State John Clayton said, "There is no reason why we should not recognize her independence." However, by the time Mann arrived in Vienna, the revolution was practically at an end. Recognition by the United States was now impossible.

Governor Lajos Kossuth and thousands of others, Stahel among them, fled abroad after the defeat. Although Stahel found sanctuary in Great Britain, he did not remain for long. Since he played such a minor role in the insurrection, powerful friends were able to assure his return without any repercussions.

Stahel became Emich's silent partner and maintained a low profile while the country was in the grip of rigid absolutism. As the political situation ameliorated somewhat, he parted with Emich and established his own publishing enterprise. The venture, however, was not successful and he was soon mired in debts. This part of Stahel's life is not well documented although a rather convoluted account of his business endeavors and financial reverses is given in Dávid Angyal's book *Falk Miksa és Kecskeméthy Aurél elkobzott levelezése* [The Confiscated Correspondence of Miksa Falk and Aurél Kecskeméthy]. The financial setbacks, as well as personal problems, prompted Stahel to leave Hungary for good in 1856.

A number of American writings state that Stahel served in the Austrian army, i.e. Hapsburg Imperial Army, before the 1848-49 War of Liberation, that he was a major figure in the revolutionary movement, and that he left Hungary permanently as a political refugee in wake of the victory of the Hapsburg and Russian armies. Clearly, such statements are incorrect. Neither was he a dancing master before the Civil War as B. Franklin Cooling's *Monocacy: The Battle that Saved Washington*, Thomas A. Lewis's *The Shenandoah in Flames: The Valley Campaign of 1864*, and Marshall M. Brice's *Conquest of a Valley* purport him to be. In this respect, these authors confuse Stahel with two other Hungarians, namely Frederick George D'Utassy, colonel of the 39th New York Infantry (Garibaldi Guard), and Gabriel DeKorponay, colonel of the 28th Pennsylvania Infantry, both of whom supported themselves for a time in the United States by giving dance lessons.

Some Hungarian and American biographical sketches describe Stahel as a confirmed bachelor. However, according to Ferenc Agárdi's article in the April-June 1963 issue of the *New Hungarian Quarterly*, Stahel was married and the death of his young wife in childbirth was one of the factors which prompted him to emigrate a second time. The existence of a wife is also hinted at in Dávid Angyal's book.

Stahel's original family name was Számwald (Számvald); he took Stahel upon coming to America. Hence, in Hungarian publications prior to 1856 his name appears as Számwald or Számvald Gyula, Gyula being the Hungarian form of Julius. (According to Hungarian custom, the family name comes first, followed by the given name. The Hungarian alphabet has no w but the letter is known and is often used in place of v in surnames.) Subsequent Hungarian writings give his name as either Számwald (Számvald), Stahel or, in deference to his change of name, as Stahel-Számwald. Only in a few American publications is he denoted as Stahel-Szamwald. A surprising number of American publications refer to him as Stahl instead of Stahel.

William C. Davis's statement in his *The Battle of New Market* that Stahel "dropped the second half

of his last name," Joseph Judge's declaration in his *Season of Fire: The Confederate Strike on Washington* that Stahel "dropped his last name for American audiences" and Thomas J. Reed's contention in his *Tibbits' Boys: A History of the 21st New York Cavalry* that Stahel is the German form of Számwald are nonsense.

Certain American biographical dictionaries, e.g. the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, claim that Stahel's his real name was Count Sebestiani. General McClellan, who held Stahel in high esteem, recalls in his memoirs: "His real name, I believe, was Count Serbiani."

How Stahel's elevation to the ranks of the nobility came about is difficult to pinpoint. It certainly did not come from Stahel himself. Even the severest critics of his military abilities conceded that he was a thoroughly honest, forthright and modest individual, not given to vain boasting of any sort. Furthermore, his middle-class background was well known in Hungarian emigre circles and any assumption of bogus titles would have invited instant ridicule as it did in the case of Frederick George D'Utassy.

Stahel's inclusion among the European nobility most likely sprung from the fertile imagination of journalists frequenting Blenker's camp. Renowned for his resplendent uniform, ostentatious quarters and lavish entertainments, Blenker had on his staff dozens of officers drawn from the lesser nobility of Germany, the best known of whom was Prince Felix Salm-Salm. This enabled Blenker to form a sort of court around him which abounded in high titles. His nobility-studded entourage was one of the early wonders of the war. Several memoirs, most notably those of McClellan and Schurz, contain vivid descriptions as well as some humorous anecdotes about Blenker's illustrious staff. Reputedly, Blenker was often heard to give orders in this wise: "Prince A., will you instruct Count B. to inspect the pickets tonight, and to take Baron S. with him."

Given these circumstances, it's not surprising that some reporters would assume that Blenker's second-in-command must be an exalted nobleman of mysterious origins while others, aware of Stahel's background, decided to confer upon him a title commensurate with those borne by most of his fellow officers. For example, the reporter who authored the article on him in the November 9, 1861 issue of *Harper's Weekly* wrote: "Julius Stahel . . . is a descendant of a family of the oldest nobility, . . ." Articles about an exiled nobleman from a distant land fighting to preserve the Union made far more colorful copy than stories about a mundane immigrant with a rather humdrum past.

References to Stahel's noble status persisted long after the end of the war. Some fifty years later, shortly after Stahel's death, New York *Times* correspondent Philip H. Dillon's poignant article, written "in loving remembrance of a gallant gentleman, a brilliant soldier," describes Stahel as "really Count Sebestiani" who upon coming to America "discarded his rank" and "became a plain American citizen."

Middle names are very rarely used in Hungary and none is indicated for Stahel in Hungarian writings. His signature on battle reports, other official documents and personal letters during his years in the United States appears simply as Julius Stahel. Most American biographical sketches also give his name as Julius Stahel; however, in a few publications his name appears with a middle initial, usually H. There is no consensus or definitive explanation regarding the "H" in these publications. According to some, the "H" seems to have gotten lost some place in the Army records;

according to others, the "H" stood for Hungarian, Stahel's proud declaration of his heritage.

Stahel remained a steadfast Hungarian patriot till the end of his long life. In his will he bequeathed his medals and a considerable portion of his papers to the Hungarian National Museum.

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### Notes:

Buda and Pest were separate cities until their amalgamation in 1873. However, for the sake of simplicity, Budapest, rather than Buda or Pest, is used in this article.

### **Biographical sketches of individuals mentioned who may not be familiar to the American reader:**

ANGYAL, Dávid (1857-1943) - Eminent teacher, editor of several historical journals, and author of a number of textbooks, he was director of the Hungarian Historical Institute in Vienna from 1929 to 1935.

EMICH, Gusztáv (1814-1869) - Acknowledged as Hungary's foremost publisher, printer and bookseller in the 1840s and 1850s, he was keenly interested in books from an early age. Following the completion of his studies in Hungary, he furthered his education in Vienna, Leipzig and Paris before starting his business in 1841. His patronage of established and budding writers was a major contributing factor in the advancement of Hungarian literature during this era.

FALK, Miksa (1828-1908) - Born in Budapest, the son of a wealthy merchant, he was forced to earn a living at the age of 14 when his father went bankrupt. Despite many hardships, he managed to earn a doctorate at the University of Pest in 1847. Moving to Vienna, he worked for a succession of liberal newspapers and also contributed articles on a regular basis to Hungarian papers. Dispersed throughout his writings were subtle barbs against the absolutist regime. His repeated calls for the restitution of the Hungarian constitution, which was suspended after the 1848-49 War of Liberation, attracted the attention of the secret police. His eloquent and forceful articles played a significant role in paving the way for the Compromise of 1867, which transformed the Hapsburg Empire into the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In 1866 he taught Hungarian to the Italian-born Empress Elizabeth. Following the Compromise, he returned to Budapest and became the chief editor of the *Pester Lloyd*, a German-language daily. He also took an active role in politics, serving several times as a representative in the national parliament. A prolific writer with numerous articles and books to his credit, he is widely regarded as the prototype of the modern Hungarian journalist.

GUYON, Richard Debaufre (1803-1856) - Born in Bath, England, the son of a naval captain, he entered the Hapsburg Imperial Army as a youth and served for six years. Resigning his commission in 1840, he settled down in Hungary as a country gentleman with his wife, Countess Mária Splényi. At the outbreak of the War of Liberation in 1848, he became a major in a National Guard unit. He quickly established a reputation as a brave and able commander. His most memorable victory occurred at Branyiszkó in February 1849. Shortly afterward he was raised to the rank of general. Following the victory of the Hapsburg and Russian armies, he fled to Turkey. As a British subject

he could have returned to England, but chose to remain and joined the Ottoman Army, taking the name Kurshid Pasha without converting to Islam. He was the first Christian who obtained the rank of Pasha in a Turkish military command without sacrificing his religion. During the Crimean War (1853-1856) he served for a time as commander of the Turkish Asiatic Army. He died at Constantinople, a victim of cholera. He was buried in the English cemetery in the presence of many of his old comrades from the 1848-49 War of Liberation. His two sons were placed in the prestigious College Henri IV by Emperor Napoleon III of France.

KECSKEMÉTHY, Aurél (1827-1877) - After completing his studies in jurisprudence in 1845, he worked as a lawyer at Budapest and Vienna until 1850 when he embarked on a career in journalism. Because he did not sympathize with the aims of the revolutionaries during the 1848-49 War of Liberation, he won the confidence of the Hapsburg government and an appointment to the press office of the Ministry of the Interior in 1854. While serving at this post, he used his influence to help Hungarian writers harassed by the police during the years of absolutist rule. His close association with Count István Széchenyi (1791-1860), often referred to as the greatest Hungarian, drew the ire of the authorities and, following a raid on his home in March of 1859, he was dismissed from his job. He then completely devoted himself to journalism not only as a writer but also as editor and owner-publisher. He was present at the ceremonies surrounding the opening of the Suez Canal in 1871 and five years later made a tour of North America, recounting his experiences and observations in the book entitled *Éjszak Amerika 1876-ban* [North America in 1876]. Under the pseudonym of Aranyos Kálkay he wrote highly popular humorous sketches.

KOSSUTH, Lajos (1802 - 1894) - The life and career of Hungary's governor during the 1848-49 War of Liberation is described in all major biographical encyclopedias. From December 1851 until July 1852 Kossuth was in the United States, touring the country and seeking support for a renewed struggle against the Hapsburgs. [A summary account of his American visit by the author appears at <http://www.iowa-counties.com/kossuth/kossuth.htm>] His appearance, demeanor and oratorical prowess made a lasting impression. George F. Hoar, a member of the Massachusetts legislature during Kossuth's sojourn, said in his *Autobiography*, penned five decades later: "*I heard six of Kossuth's very best speeches. He was a marvellous orator. He seemed to have mastered the whole vocabulary of English speech, and to have a rare gift of choosing words that accurately expressed his meaning, and he used so to fashion his sentences that they were melodious and delightful to the ear. . . . his speeches were gems. They were beautiful in substance and in manner.*" Monuments to Kossuth stand in several American communities; perhaps the most imposing of these is the one at Riverside Drive in New York City. A number of places, e.g. Kossuth County in Iowa, are named after him. In 1958 Kossuth was honored on the Champion of Liberty series of stamps issued by the US Postal Service.

PETŐFI, Sándor (1823-1849(?)) - One of the most outstanding figures of Hungarian literature, he was the son of a country butcher. Receiving only a haphazard education in various small provincial towns, he started writing poetry at the age of 12. After wandering all over Hungary and enduring all sorts of hardships, he settled down at Budapest in 1844. In the same year, his first volume of original poetry was published, bringing him immediate fame. He also became associated with the young intellectuals. Politically he was an extreme radical and an admirer of the French Revolution. In addition to writing poetry, he translated German, French and English works into Hungarian. Much of his best love poetry was inspired by his wife, Júlia Szendrey (1828-1868), whom he

married in 1847. Posterity has placed him among the immortals; his poems have been translated into more than fifty languages. On March 15, 1848, in the presence of a huge crowd, Petőfi delivered his stirring poem, *Talpra Magyar* [Rise, Hungarian], one of his greatest and best known works. A major during the War of Independence, he was never seen after the battle of Segesvár in July 1849. His body is supposed to have been buried in the common grave of the fallen patriots in the churchyard of Fehéregyház. However, according to the 15th edition of the *New Encyclopedia Britannica* - citing discoveries made in Czarist archives by Soviet researchers in the 1980s - Petőfi was among the some 1500 prisoners-of-war taken to Siberia where he perished of tuberculosis in 1856. While any statements from Communist sources must be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism, this one has a ring of truth to it. The Czarist regime, like the succeeding Communist dictatorship, was not above the wholesale slaughter of political opponents, prisoners-of-war and "suspect" civilians or their banishment to Siberia.

PULSZKY, Ferenc (1814-1897) - Author, statesman, archeologist, antiquarian and historian, he was born into a well-to-do family. After completing his law studies at the age of 19, he travelled extensively throughout western Europe. In 1836 he entered government service, becoming a high official in Sáros County. He also began to contribute articles on politics and economics to Hungarian newspapers and in 1839 became a correspondent to the prestigious *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Augsburg. As a member of a committee entrusted with codifying criminal laws in 1841, he exchanged views with the renowned jurist Karl Josef Anton Mittermaier of Heidelberg. While residing in Vienna in 1845, he married Terézia Walter (1819-1866), the talented daughter of a banker. Seven children were born of their union. An accomplished writer herself, she often collaborated with her husband. At the outbreak of the revolutionary movement in 1848, Pulszky filled a number of important posts in the new Hungarian government, including those of Secretary of State for Finance and Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Afterwards he was sent by Governor Lajos Kossuth to England to represent the cause of Hungary. When Kossuth embarked on his visit to the United States in December 1851, Pulszky and his wife were among those who accompanied him. Upon their return to Great Britain, they recounted their experiences and impressions of America in the book *White, Red, Black* [reprinted by the Negro Universities Press in 1968]. In 1860 he moved to Italy as correspondent for the British paper the *Daily News*. Following differences of opinion with Kossuth as to the direction of the emigre movement, he withdrew from public life and immersed himself in his favorite passion, the study of fine arts. Shortly before the Compromise of 1867, Pulszky returned to Hungary. He suffered a series of personal tragedies; in a span of a few months, his wife, daughter Harriet and son Gábor all died. Despite these devastating blows, he resumed his political career and took a most active role in several historical, anthropological, archeological, literary and fine arts societies. In 1869 he was appointed director of the National Museum, a position which he held until his retirement in 1894. For his far-ranging cultural activities he was showered with honors in Hungary and abroad; one of the awards bestowed on him was the Order of Medsidje by the Sultan of Turkey. His two semi-autobiographical works, *Életem és Korom* [My Life and Times] and *Számkivetés alatt Olaszországban* [In Exile in Italy], replete with astute observations of European political events, were penned during the 1880s. At the age of 72, he married a second time, taking Róza-Terézia Geszner as his wife and devoted most of his time to archeology. His monumental *Magyarország archaeológiája* [The Archeology of Hungary] was completed shortly before his death to great critical acclaim.

**Petőfi's January 1848 poem to Stahel:**

EGY KÖNYVÁRUS EMLÉKKÖNYVÉBE

Az életcél boldogság, de előbb  
Fáradni kell, hogy ezt a célt elérd,  
Ugy ingyen ahhoz senki sem jut el,  
Ahhoz nagyon sok mindenféle kel:  
A becsülettől soha el ne térj  
Sem indulatból, sem pedig díjért,  
Szeresd hiven felebarátidat,  
Ne vond föl közted s más közt a hidat,  
A hon nevét, a drága szent hazát  
Szivednek legtisztább helyére zárd,  
S imádd az istent, s mindenekfelett  
Áruld erősen költeményimet.

**Translated, it reads:**

TO A BOOKSELLER'S MEMORIAL BOOK

The goal of life is happiness, but first,  
One must tire to reach that goal,  
No one reaches it free of charge,  
Many different things are needed for it:  
Never stray from honor,  
Neither purposely nor for reward,  
Love truly your fellow human beings,  
Do not draw up the bridge between yourself and someone else,  
The name of the homeland, the precious sacred homeland,  
Lock into the purest part of your heart,  
And worship God, and above all,  
Briskly sell my poetry.

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The Author, Stephen Beszedits, was born in Hungary and educated in the United States and Canada. He received his bachelor's degree from Columbia University and his master's degree from the University of Toronto. He has written on a wide range of topics and is the author of *Eminent Toronto Architects of the Past*. He is the grandnephew of Lajos Zilahy, one of the leading Hungarian writers of this century, who resided in New York City from 1947 until his death and is best known to American audiences for his novels *The Dukays*, *Two Prisoners*, *The Deserter*, *Century in Scarlet*, and *The Angry Angel*.

Additional information on Hungarians in the Civil War may be obtained by contacting Mr. Beszedits by email ([s.beszedits@utoronto.ca](mailto:s.beszedits@utoronto.ca)) or writing to B & L Information Services, Box 73535, Wychwood Stn., 509 St. Clair Ave. West Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6C 1C0. You may also access the above information by going to his website, *B & L Information Services*, at <http://www.silbert.org/BandL.html>.

