

MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES



Loyal Legion Vignettes

NOTABLE HUNGARIANS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE CIVIL WAR

By

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Preface

The Civil War has been the subject of more publications than any other episode in American history. One area of the conflict, however, that has received scant attention is the participation and contributions of the foreign-born. This is especially true in the case of smaller ethnic groups, such as the Hungarians.

To provide an accurate and in-depth picture of Hungarians in the Civil War a series of books are being prepared that draw upon the most reliable American and Hungarian primary and secondary sources. The contents, format, and price of the first in the series publication *The Libby Prison Diary of Colonel Emeric Szabad*, along with information on ordering, are given below. The next release will be *Colonel Geza Mihalotzy and the 24th Illinois Infantry*. An overview of Hungarian involvement in the Civil War and brief comments on several of the prominent participants are presented in the ensuing Vignette entitled, *Notable Hungarians and Their Contributions in the Civil War*.

Featured Article

The Civil War, once described by Abraham Lincoln as a fiery trial through which America must pass, settled once and for all the indivisibility of the United States. It preserved the Union and transformed it into a nation. Just how many individuals served in the armed forces of either the Federal or Confederate armies can only be approximated. Estimates range from 1,555,000 to 2,200,000 Federals and about 700,000 Confederates.

It is often forgotten that many of the soldiers on both sides were foreign-born. Approximately 25% of the Union army's ranks were filled by men who were born abroad. Immigrant soldiers were less prevalent on the other side; only 9% of the Confederate armies were foreign-born. In absolute figures, Germans outnumbered the war's other foreigners. More than 200,000 German-born citizens served the Union in the Civil War. Second in number to the Germans were the Irish. Some 150,000 of their numbers served in the Federal army.

While today some 1.6 million Americans are of Hungarian descent, the Hungarian population of the United States at the outbreak of the Civil War was only about 4,000. Consequently, compared to the Germans and Irish, the number of Hungarians involved in the epic struggle was miniscule. Exactly how many Hungarians fought in the war is impossible to establish. Estimates range as high as 800, although a figure of 300-400 seems more reasonable.

However, it is generally conceded that the degree of Hungarian participation exceeded that of any other ethnic group in America. Hungarians also furnished a disproportionately large number of officers; some one hundred served as officers in the Union army. The reasons for these startling facts are straightforward; many of the Hungarians living in the United States at the time of the Civil War were veterans of the 1848-49 Hungarian War of Liberation.

In 1848 Hungary was part of the sprawling Hapsburg Empire. The ideals of the revolutionary movements sweeping across France, Italy and Germany in the spring of that year struck a responsive chord in Hungary. Progressive elements, led by Governor Lajos Kossuth, demanded social, political and economic reforms. Peaceful negotiations quickly escalated into open warfare. The hastily organized and poorly equipped Hungarian forces sustained a series of defeats during the early stages of the conflict, but managed to turn the tide by May 1849, driving out virtually all Imperial troops from the country. At this point, the Hapsburg government appealed to Czar Nicholas I of Russia for help. Fearful lest the revolution spread to his own dominions, the Czar promptly dispatched a huge army. Attacked from every point of the compass, Hungarian patriots fought bravely against overwhelming odds. However, with no diplomatic or military aid from abroad, the fate of Hungary was sealed. The surrender of the great fortress of Komárom on September 27, 1849, brought the war to an end.

To escape the vengeance of the Hapsburgs and their Russian allies, thousands, including Kossuth, fled to Turkey. Others made their way to France, Italy and England. Later, hundreds of these emigres found sanctuary in the United States. They constituted the first significant wave of Hungarian immigrants to America.

Kossuth and the majority of the exiles felt confident that the next war involving the Hapsburgs and/or Russia would give the opportunity to renew the struggle for Hungarian independence. To this end, exiles fought in the Crimean War and the War of 1859 in Italy, which pitted Piedmont, supported by France, against the Hapsburg Empire. Hungarians also played a prominent role in Giuseppe Garibaldi's 1860 campaign against the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

While the overwhelming majority of Hungarians in the United States served in the Union Army, a handful also found their way into the Confederate ranks. The most famous Hungarian Confederate was colonel Bela Estvan. Another noteworthy Hungarian on the Southern side was Charles Vidor, grandfather of eminent moviemaker King Vidor [The names of all Hungarians who participated in the Civil War are written as they appear in official documents].

Since Hungarians were few in number and scattered through much of the country, they were unable to form separate units in imitation of the Germans and the Irish. Consequently, Hungarians cannot be discussed as a group, only as individuals. It is often stated that about one-half of the 39th New York Infantry (Garibaldi Guard) was composed of Hungarians. Actually, there were only about a dozen Hungarians in the regiment; the misconception about their numbers is due largely to the fact that when the regiment was organized its commander and several of the high-ranking officers were Hungarians. Hungarians were conspicuous on the staff of General John C. Fremont during his command of both the Western Department and the Mountain Department. However, only a few held positions of importance.

The three most prominent and most-written about Hungarians of the Civil War are Alexander

Asboth, Julius Stahel and Charles Zagonyi.

Born in 1811 and educated as an engineer, Alexander Asboth was the scion of a family long prominent in the history of Hungary. During the War of Liberation he was a lieutenant-colonel and Kossuth's most trusted adjutant. He accompanied Kossuth into exile and shared the entire Turkish internment with him. Asboth came to the United States in 1851 aboard the frigate *Mississippi*, the vessel dispatched by President Millard Fillmore to bring the ex-Governor and his companions to America. When Frémont was appointed commander of the Western Department in July 1861, he made Asboth his chief-of-staff with rank of brigadier-general. In the battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, March 7-8, 1862, Asboth led the Second Division of the Army of Southwestern Missouri. Despite suffering a serious arm wound on the first day of fighting, he was back in the saddle for the second day of the battle. From January 1863 until August 1863 he was commander of the District of Columbus, Kentucky. Shortly afterward, he was appointed commander of the District of West Florida, Department of the Gulf. While leading a charge at Marianna, September 27, 1864, bullets penetrated his cheek and shattered his left arm. He was brevetted major-general on March 13, 1865.

Prior to the War of Liberation, Julius Stahel was an associate of Gusztáv Emmich, Hungary's leading publisher and bookseller. During the conflict he served as a lieutenant. Stahel left Hungary in 1856 due to personal and financial reasons rather than political persecution. Settling in New York city as a journalist, he quickly acquired an enviable reputation in the community. At the outbreak of the Civil War he helped to organize the 8th New York Infantry, becoming the regiment's lieutenant-colonel. For his conduct in covering the Federal retreat at the first battle of Bull Run, he was promoted to colonel on August 11, 1861, and soon afterward to brigadier-general. In March 1863 he was advanced to major-general and assigned the task of curbing John Singleton Mosby, the elusive and daring "Gray Ghost" of the Confederacy. At the Gettysburg dedication ceremonies, November 1863, he led the honor guard. Severe wounds sustained in the battle of Piedmont, Virginia, June 5, 1864, compelled him to relinquish field duties. For his reckless bravery and leadership in that engagement, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor twenty-nine years later, in 1893. Julius Stahel also was an Original Companion of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion, Insignia #1491, New York Commandery.

A professional soldier, Charles Zagonyi was a cavalry captain in during the War of Liberation. He came to the United States in 1851 by way of Turkey and England. In the years leading up to the Civil War, he held a variety of jobs: farm hand, housepainter, tailor, and instructor at the Boston riding academy of fellow Hungarian emigre János Kalapsza. Joining Frémont's Western Department, he organized and commanded the Body Guard, an elite unit of cavalymen. At Springfield, Missouri, on October 25, 1861, Zagonyi led his troopers against a Confederate force that outnumbered them by about ten to one and defeated them. This daring act brought him enduring fame. Subsequently, he served as Frémont's chief-of-cavalry with rank of colonel in the Mountain Department. He is the overt hero of Jessie Benton Frémont's *Story of the Guard*, published in 1863.

Some other notable Hungarians of the war were:

Eugene A. Kozlay organized the 54th New York Infantry Regiment and was its colonel from November 1861 to March 1863 and again from March 1864 to April 1866. For gallant and meritorious services, he was brevetted brigadier-general on March 13, 1865.

A close friend of Lew Wallace, the author of *Ben-Hur* and other popular novels, Frederick Knefler started his Civil War career under Wallace in the 11th Indiana Infantry. When Wallace was promoted to brigadier-general in September 1861, he chose Knefler, then a captain, as his assistant adjutant-general. In May of 1862 he was promoted to major. Upon the formation of the 79th Indiana Infantry in August 1862, he was appointed the regiment's colonel. Knefler fought in several of the bloodiest engagements of the war, including Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Perryville, Stone's River, Chickamagua, Missionary Ridge and Nashville. On

March 13, 1865, he was brevetted brigadier-general, the highest rank attained in the Union army by a member of the Jewish faith.

Regarded as one of the more flamboyant figures of the Civil War, colonel Frederick George D'Utassy led the 39th New York Infantry (Garibaldi Guard) until his fall from grace in May of 1863. His two brothers, Carl and Anton, also served in this regiment.

Geza Mihalotzy was colonel of the 24th Illinois Infantry until struck and mortally wounded by a Confederate bullet on February 24, 1864, near Buzzard Roost Gap in Tennessee. To honor his memory, two forts, one in Chattanooga and the other in Knoxville, were named after him.

One of the founders of New Buda, the Hungarian settlement in Iowa, George Pomutz began his Civil War career as a first-lieutenant and adjutant with the 15th Iowa Infantry Regiment and finished it as a brigadier-general by brevet. Insignia #2684, Indiana Commandery

A prominent politician before the War of Liberation, colonel Nicholas Perczel commanded the 10th Iowa Infantry. Mór Perczel, one of the leading generals of the Hungarian army in the conflict against the Hapsburgs, was his older brother. For their participation in the war, both brothers were executed in effigy by the Imperial authorities in September of 1851.

One of the organizers of the Home Guards in St. Louis, Missouri, Anselm Albert participated in the capture of Camp Jackson in May 1861, and was wounded during the battle of Wilson's Creek on August 10 of the same year. Following his recovery, he became a staff officer with rank of colonel in the Western Department and afterward was Frémont's chief-of-staff in the Mountain Department.

Philip Figyelmessy, colonel on the staffs of Generals Frémont and Stahel, was the exiled Kossuth's most daring and resourceful agent. A master of disguise, he carried out numerous clandestine missions and was never apprehended despite the huge reward on his head. During Garibaldi's campaign in southern Italy, he commanded the First Squadron of Hungarian Hussars, distinguishing himself in numerous engagements, especially the battle of the Volturno.

Unlike most of the other Hungarian participants in the Civil War, Gabriel DeKorponay, colonel of the 28th Pennsylvania Infantry, came to the United States before the 1848-49 War of Liberation. In the years leading up to the Civil War he lived and worked in various parts of the country. For a while he was a teacher at a school where he also gave fencing lessons. One of his favorite pupils was George Dashiell Bayard, who rose to the rank of brigadier-general during the Civil War and was fatally wounded at Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December 1862.

Geza Haraszthy, initially captain and later major with the 18th New York Cavalry Regiment, was the eldest son of Ágoston Haraszthy, the founder of Sauk City, Iowa, and the "Father of California Viticulture."

Anton Gerster, a captain, first with the 5th Missouri Infantry and then with the 27th Missouri Infantry, was the uncle of two world-renowned Gersters: Dr. Árpád Gerster, a pioneer in modern surgical techniques, and Etelka Gerster, the prima donna. Among Dr. Gerster's pupils while teaching at New York Polyclinic were the Mayo brothers, of Rochester, Minnesota. A rival of Adelina Patti, Etelka made her American debut in 1879 in *La Sonnambula*.

An internationally acclaimed author who wrote with equal ease in Hungarian, English and French, Emeric Szabad was a captain on the staffs of Generals John C. Frémont, Daniel E. Sickles and Gouverneur K. Warren. He was brevetted major and lieutenant-colonel on March 13, 1865, and colonel two weeks later for gallant and meritorious services in the battles before Petersburg, Virginia. Before coming to America, he fought in Italy as a member of Garibaldi's Hungarian Legion. While residing in England, he contributed the entries on Hungary, Austria

and Denmark to the 8th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Joseph Pulitzer, the future newspaper magnate, was only seventeen years old when he enrolled in the 1st New York (Lincoln) Cavalry Regiment in November 1864.

It would be remiss to omit the five sons of Kossuth's two sisters, Albert Ruttkay, and the Zulavsky brothers: Emil, Ladislav, Casimir and Sigismund. Ladislav and Emil were veterans of Garibaldi's Hungarian Legion. Ladislav, the most militarily talented of the brothers, was colonel of the 82nd U.S. Colored Infantry. He was also an Original Companion of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Insignia #1167, New York Commandery. The four Rombauer brothers: Robert Julius, Roderick Emile, Raphael Guido and Roland, all rendered distinguished service during the Civil War as officers. Their father, Tivadar, was director of armaments during the Hungarian War of Liberation. Their mother, Berta, spent her free time translating Hungarian poems into German, earning her a lasting place among notable German-American women. Her collection *Bunte Blätter* was published in St. Louis in 1869. Their sister, Ida, was the wife of John Fiala, who prepared the first great map of Missouri and was Frémont's chief topographical engineer in the Western Department as well as in the Mountain Department.

While the Civil War was raging in America, domestic and international developments were gradually loosening the grip of absolutism in Hungary. Already weakened by the War of 1859 in Italy, the Hapsburgs suffered additional setback at the hands of Bismarck's Prussia in 1866. To prevent further decline in the status of his realm, Emperor Franz Joseph sought an accommodation with Hungary. The negotiations culminated in the Compromise of 1867, which established the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. A general amnesty for all political offenses incurred in 1848-49 was also proclaimed, prompting a number of the exiles to return.

Exiles living in various European countries comprised the bulk of those who returned; only a few from the United States went back. Many of the veterans who stayed were rewarded with various civil service positions, especially in the diplomatic corps.

Alexander Asboth was appointed minister to Argentina by President Andrew Johnson in 1866. Because surgeons were unable to extract the bullet lodged in his cheek, he was in constant pain and his senses of sight, smell, taste and hearing were impaired. Despite his discomfiture, he strived valiantly to mediate an end to the devastating war which pitted Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil against Paraguay. He finally succumbed to his wounds on January 21, 1868, and was buried in the British Cemetery of Buenos Aires. His remains were reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery in 1990.

Julius Stahel was consul at Yokohama from 1866 to 1869 and was instrumental in opening additional Japanese ports to American trade. He returned as consul to Japan in 1877, remaining there until 1884, when he was made consul general at Shanghai, China. One of his colleagues in the Far East, the consul at Hong Kong, was none other than his one-time nemesis, John Singleton Mosby. The two men developed a strong respect for each other, and Mosby was so impressed by Stahel's character that he recommended his appointment as assistant secretary of state.

George Pomutz became consul to Russia in 1866, and consul general in 1874. He also belonged, as an Original Companion, to the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Insignia #1156, Pennsylvania Commandery. Hugo Hillebrandt, major with the 39th New York Infantry and subsequently captain with the Veteran Corps, was posted as consul to the island of Crete. Philip Fygelmessy spent a dozen years as consul in British Guyana.

Others made their mark in commerce, law, medicine and various other fields. Julian Kuné, one of the principal organizers of the 24th Illinois Infantry, became a member of the Chicago Board of Trade. Frederick Knefler established a successful law firm in Indianapolis. He also served as

president of the board of regents of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Indiana's memorial to its Civil War veterans and was an Original Companion of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Insignia #2684, Indiana Commandery. Roderick Emile Rombauer became a much-respected judge in St. Louis. Joseph Pulitzer embarked on a meteoric career in journalism. He endowed the School of Journalism at Columbia University and established the prizes bearing his name for excellence in journalism, letters and music. Dr. Rudolf Tauszky, who served as assistant surgeon with rank of first-lieutenant in the Union army, built up a thriving practice in New York city, specializing in matters involving sanity. Tragically, he himself became mentally unbalanced in 1885. After attempting to kill his wife and commit suicide, he was committed to Bloomingdale Asylum, where he died in 1889. Returning to Hungary after the Compromise of 1867, Nicholas Perczel reentered the political arena. He died full of honors at the age of ninety-two. Geza Haraszthy, along with his father, mother and grandfather, left the United States in 1866 for Nicaragua, where they established a thriving plantation. Three years later his father disappeared while trying to cross an alligator-infested stream. Geza died after a short bout with diphtheria at the age of forty-four.

Charles Zagonyi vanished around 1867; his fate remains a mystery to this day. Some American authors state that he went back to Hungary after the Compromise and opened a cigar store in Budapest. However, according to reliable Hungarian sources, particularly the memoirs of his close friend Lajos Dancs, Zagonyi never returned to Hungary.

Hungarians also contributed in ways other than rendering military service. For example, the comfortable cavalry saddle introduced by General George B. McClellan was borrowed from the Prussians who, in turn, copied the design from the Hungarians.

Because of the number of Hungarians serving on his staff and in various units attached to the Western Department, Frémont sent many of his communiques, particularly sensitive ones, to his subordinate commanders in Hungarian. Sending messages in Hungarian was simpler and safer than using some type of code. Even if intercepted, the message was unlikely to be "deciphered" because there were very few Hungarian-speakers on the Confederate side.

Hungarian participants also made a noteworthy contribution to the Civil War literature. Robert J. Rombauer's *The Union Cause in St. Louis; A Historical Sketch* is considered to be the definitive work on the history of the Union movement of 1861 in St. Louis. Julian Kuné's *Reminiscences of an Octogenerian Hungarian Exile* provides many interesting details about the organization of the 24th Illinois Infantry Regiment. Frederick Knefler wrote a discourse about the storming of Missionary Ridge, an engagement in which he won many accolades. Emeric Szabad's account of his confinement in Libby Prison was published shortly after the war in both the United States and England. Nicholas Perczel and Henry Lang, captain of the 48th New York Infantry, also wrote about their Civil War experiences. Interestingly enough, the most popular work on the Civil War by a Hungarian was penned by Confederate Colonel Bela Estvan. His *War Pictures from the South* was published in 1863 in the United States and England, followed by a German edition entitled *Kriegsbilder aus Amerika* in 1864. Several descendants of Hungarian participants in the war are also worthy of mention. For example, one of General Kozlay's sons, Charles Meeker Kozlay, a prominent printer and founder of the H.R. Howell Publishing Company, was a staunch patron of Bret Harte and his works. Joseph Pulitzer Jr., the famed journalist's eldest son, was publisher and editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from 1911 until his death in 1955. Named after his flamboyant and controversial uncle, Anton D'Utassy's son, George, was born in 1870. Graduating from Harvard University in 1898, this George D'Utassy went on a long and distinguished career in publishing. Beginning with Harper & Brothers after the completion of his studies, he was publisher of *Motor*, *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, *Motor Boating*, *Hearst's Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Nash's Magazine* (London), and the *Illustrated Daily News*, afterward the *New York Daily Mirror*. He was also vice-president of the International Film Company. Edgar Roderick Rombauer, one of Roderick Emile Rombauer's sons, was for many years president of the Urban League of St. Louis. His wife, née Irma von Starkloff, was the author of the *Joy of Cooking*, one of the most popular cookbooks of all time.

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The Author:

Born in Hungary and educated in the United States and Canada, Stephen Beszedits 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*.

Note:

The following Hungarian Officers were also Original Companions of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States:

Julius Stahel (Insignia #1491, New York Commandery)
Ladislav Zulavsky (Insignia #1167, New York Commandery)
Frederick Knefler (Insignia #2684, Indiana Commandery)
George Pomutz (Insignia #1156, Pennsylvania Commandery)

Ordering Information:

The Libby Prison Diary of Colonel Emeric Szabad, by Stephen Beszedits was published January 1999 (ISBN 0-920720-05-6). It is 112 pages, approximately 25,000 words, long, 8.5 x 11 inches perfect bound. The price of the book is \$23.50 (U.S.), which includes handling & shipping to all U.S. destinations.

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