

MAGYAR FRONT[®]

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Emperor Charles IV's Knights of the Golden Spur

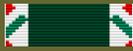


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Wool-Sleeved
Leather Jerkin
Adventure**



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*"To strive, to seek, to find,
and not to yield."*

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weekly newspaper of the Frontline
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published from the early 1930s until
the end of the Second World War.

A note from the Editor

The Hungarian Ministry of Defence Military History Institute and Museum published a book entitled *Charles IV's Knights of the Golden Spur, 1916* by IHMHPS member Gergely Sallay and researcher János Szentváry-Lukács last year. The richly illustrated hard-cover book introduces the interesting and unique story of the Knights of the Golden Spur inaugurated on the occasion of the coronation of the last king of Hungary, Charles IV, on 30 December 1916.

The two authors have summed up the topic in English for this issue of the *Magyar Front*, featuring never before published photographs of one of the knights invested in 1916. These images were provided for publication by the grandson of Knight of the Golden Spur, Aladár de Münnich, after the launch of the book. Therefore, along with the pictures, our readers will find the biography of Lieutenant Münnich on page 11 in this issue (fifty of the like can be found in the book). Interestingly, Aladár Münnich, a renowned architect, lived in Canada for the last twenty-five years of his life. He died in the United Kingdom, but his ashes were subsequently, interred in Montreal.

The book does not only cover the story of the inauguration and provides the biographies of all the individuals chosen for the special title, it also introduces one of the rarest and most impressive Hungarian insignia, that of the Knights of the Golden Spur of 1916 (which was instituted in 1918 and worn by the knights only after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy).

Once again, Gergely Sallay had so kindly and generously facilitated our exposure to such treasures through this article – for more beautiful images and the complete story, *Charles IV's Knights of the Golden Spur, 1916* is available at the Hungarian MoD Military History Institute and Museum. Contact Gergely Sallay if you wish to purchase this spectacular book on one of Hungary's most beautiful decorations.

This issue marks a slight change in the way the *Magyar Front* will be distributed to IHMHPS members. Unfortunately, our printer, who has been giving us a very generous non-profit discount has closed permanently due to difficulties caused by the global pandemic. Consequently, our printing cost will be almost five times higher, so although paid members will still receive their hard-copy of the *Magyar Front* (along with the digital version), I will not be able to provide complementary copies - I hope that the digital variety will suffice in those cases.

P.Cz.

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Charles IV's Knights of the Golden Spur, 1916



by Gergely Pál Sallay and János Szentváry-Lukács

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Knights of the Golden Spur in front of the Matthias Church, 30 December 1916.

The coronation of the last king of Hungary, Charles IV, took place on 30 December 1916. Committees were established to make the preparations. Chairing the sub-committee for technical and artistic matters was Count Miklós Bánffy, who can be regarded as the coronation's "chief organiser." Bánffy asked architects to design the coronation, commissioning Jenő Lechner to decorate the Coronation Church, Móricz Pogány to build the podium on which the new king would take his oath, and Károly Kós to create a coronation mound. A start was made to the selecting of those who would play a part in the coronation ceremony, and to the drawing up, agreeing, and finalisation of both the diploma inaugurale and the text of the oath.

Constitutional as well as ecclesiastical in character, the ceremonial of coronations in Hungary had taken shape over the centuries. The first action of a newly crowned king was – as a part of the ceremony itself – the inducting of Knights of the Golden Spur. The first documented instance of this was in 1563, after which it was an element of the coronation ceremony. Hungary's Knights of the Golden Spur did not constitute an order of knighthood in the traditional sense of the term: there was no "Order of the Golden Spur" in the Kingdom of Hungary. The knights had no grand master or other officers. Only on one occasion, namely that of his coronation, could a king confer this honour, to persons

chosen from those judged worthy of it by virtue of outstanding service (political or public) during the reign of that king's predecessor. Making preparations for the inducting of the knights – selecting candidates, vetting them, and informing those who were successful – was a delicate political task. The number of knights inaugurated at a coronation varied depending on the domestic political situation at the time of the coronation in question; the lowest number inducted was four and the highest forty-nine. The magnates or nobles to be inducted were chosen by Hungary's chief minister, who presented their names to the king.

Reference is found to the official criteria for selection in a letter dated 17 December 1916 from Count István Tisza, Hungary's prime minister, to Zdenko Lobkowitz, principal aide-de-camp to Charles: "Very great interest is being shown in the matter, and among our young men serving at the front this honour has enormous value. I am of the opinion, therefore, that I was striving in accordance with the highest intentions when, from the very many nominations, I selected those who, by their performance in this war, best deserved this honour; and were the above honour graciously awarded to them, I would be profoundly grateful." At the same time, in the case of the selection of young officers, a role was played not just by their qualities in the war, but also by the

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**Obverse of the badge of the
Knights of the Golden Spur,
awarded to Zoltán Farkas.**

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**Reverse of the badge of the
Knights of the Golden Spur,
awarded to Zoltán Farkas.**



Right: Detail of Hungary's Crown of St. Stephen on the lid of the presentation case.



Above:
The presentation case for the insignia of the Knights of the Golden Spur finished in burgundy leatherette with a gold embossed Hungarian crown.

The insignia of the Knights of the Golden Spur from the estate of Zoltán Farkas, in its original case of issue.

The Bachruch company hallmark appears in the upper lining of the case.

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Below: Zoltán Farkas' medal ribbon bar.* The first ribbon represents the badge of the Knights of the Golden Spur, even though the original intention was that the insignia should be worn only in its original form, around the neck. The other ribbons mostly represent awards for service and battlefield merit during both World Wars. Farkas fought as a hussar lieutenant colonel during the Second World War .



*shown actual size.

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merits and role in public life of their families and parents. Selection and recommendation of candidates was a task for Prime Minister Count István Tisza. Given the urgency of the coronation, it is partly understandable that “the prominent,” relatives, and colleagues’ sons at the front (i.e. sons of government ministers and parliamentary deputies) were considered.

István Tisza sent his first recommendations to the principal aide-de-camp on 12 December. The list contained twenty-nine names. On the basis of it, the very next day the Ministry of War in Vienna and the Ministry of National Defence in Budapest began investigations regarding the precise whereabouts of the persons who featured. Finding out was not always an easy task, because as well as those who were with their regiments at the front, there were those who had been posted to other regiments and others who were serving in the rear. Those wounded were either in hospital or at home on sick leave; others might simply be on leave. Reports that also pertained to their lives before military service were requested by telegram from candidates’ original regiments.

On 17 December 1916, the prime minister sent his submission – in two parts and in official form already – to Charles’s Military Office. The first part featured a list of names that was exactly the same as the one sent informally earlier on. The persons proposed were chosen from “the prominent.” Among them, family connections and kinship ties characteristic of aristocratic society can be observed. The second, supplementary, list sent by Tisza to Lobkowitz that same day featured another nineteen candidates. The names

pencilled in on the petitions and finally accepted for induction attests to “repechage” during the process. From 23 December on, the press carried lists of various lengths that had been leaked, but even the list of names published in the Coronation Album after Charles’s crowning is incorrect. A list corresponding to reality, i.e. a list of those actually inducted, was published in Hungary’s directory of officers for 1917.

Between 23 and 29 December, the commanding officers of those inducted were ordered to grant them leave and to send them off to the ceremony. On 29 December, those to be honoured participated in a rehearsal on the site of the coronation the following day.

On 30 December 1916, forty-seven selected officers present for the event took their places together with the chief dignitaries of the country in front of the king’s throne in the Matthias Church (Church of Our Lady in Buda Castle). Some of those selected did not take part. Examples were László Barcsay, who had fallen seriously ill and who was in hospital; Nikola Jurković and Miklós Kovács-Sebestény, who had not been notified in time; and Pál Leidenfrost, whose name had been struck from the list on account of the report on him sent by his commanding officer. When the induction ceremony was over, the new Knights of the Golden Spur filed out of the church to Holy Trinity Square, and took their places next to a group consisting of privy councillors and chamberlains for the duration of the remaining events of the coronation ceremony.

During the ceremony, those inducted received no insignia. The idea for a commemorative badge emerged only after the

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Reserve 2nd Lieutenant Emil Poppr



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Reserve 1st Lieutenant Bertalan Szepesházy de Felsővízköz

Previous pages:

Reserve 2nd Lieutenant Emil Poppr, painted by Dezső Tipary from a photo, 1930. Poppr volunteered for the Army and joined the Imperial and Royal 83rd Infantry Regiment in November 1915, and soon he was sent to the Russian theatre. Displaying the greatest courage, in a short time he earned all four classes of the Bravery Medal, including the golden grade. After the war, he was also deemed worthy to receive the Knight's Cross of the Military Order of Maria Theresa.

Portrait of Reserve 1st Lieutenant Bertalan Szepesházy de Felsővízköz, by Miklós Jordán. Szepesházy served as an artillery officer during the First World War. From 30 October to 7 November 1915, during the fighting between Siemikowce and Rakowiec, while he was a supply officer, he provided an exemplary supply of ammunition, with exemplary bravery and death-defying courage, in the midst of the fiercest enemy fire.



Above:

Artillery Major István Badics de Szentkirály-Szabadja, wearing the insignia of the Knights of the Golden Spur, circa 1942.

Badics, as a second year medical student, volunteered for active service in 1914 and served with the artillery. He was awarded the Golden Bravery Medal for his exemplary valour. After the First World War, he became a regular officer of the Royal Hungarian Defence Forces. He fought in the Second World War and was taken into Soviet captivity.

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coronation, and its realisation was a lengthy affair. The earliest source pertaining to such a badge is an assemblage of documents dated July 1917. It emerges from these that Josef Hoffmann, an instructor at Vienna's School of Applied Arts and an adviser to the government, sent two versions of a design for a badge to the Ministry of the Imperial and Royal House and of the Exterior.

The next data are found in the minutes for Sitting No. 35 of the Hungarian Council of Ministers held on 26 October 1917. According to this information, the insignia had by then been made, with that body deciding in connection with the costs arising. A document dated 12 December 1917 attests to the making of the insignia, and to the arrival of one example at the above-mentioned ministry. Despite its ornateness, the badge to be established was seen not as the insignia of an order, but as a commemorative item that could be worn. Although on the basis of sources from the time it seems that one year after the induction of his Knights of the Golden Spur every detail regarding the commemorative badge was already settled, Charles only decided on its official establishment in a rescript issued by him dated 10 April 1918:

"I have decided to establish a commemorative badge for those whom I made Knights of the Golden Spur on the memorable day of my coronation with the Crown of St. Stephen. This badge will consist of a golden spur whose neck is a prong and whose outer edge is fluted. The two ends of the heel band point upwards. A green-enamelled dragon lies on gold grillwork. On top of the dragon is a white enamel two-barred cross of Hungary with a gold K in the middle. At the top is the Holy Crown of Hungary. The badge is to be worn at the neck on the ribbon for the Order of St. Stephen."

The order for the badges was placed with Budapest's Bachruch firm. Despite the establishment of the badge in April 1918 and the making of the individual examples in late 1917, no distribution took place for the time being. This is attested by a letter of 23 October 1918 in which the Bachruch firm indicated that because of the impounding of silk goods it was unable to deliver the badges. Requests aimed at acquiring the ribbons were still being denied on 13 November 1918. Taking into account that the badge was to be worn on a ribbon the same as the neck ribbon for an existing decoration (the Commander's Cross of the Royal Hungarian Order of St. Stephen), this seems rather odd, although it well conveys the scale of shortages by the end of the war.

The ribbon for the badge of the Knights of the Golden Spur turned into a minor problem in November 1918. In Vienna, as well as in Budapest, everything changed. With or without their ribbons, the badges were waiting for the end of a perilous time (the Aster Revolution and the communist Republic of Councils periods followed by many months of Czech, Romanian, and Serbian occupation). According to our present knowledge, of the known photographs and depictions of persons wearing the badge the earliest is a dedicated portrait of Zoltán Vén with the date 23 February 1920 on the reverse. It is a fact that badges of the Knights of the Golden Spur have been passed down in several families; in other

words, those eligible were able in some way to obtain the examples due to them.

Some badges have survived in identically made maroon leather cases with an image of the Holy Crown of Hungary in gold on the top. On the silk lining of the lid, the mark of a single firm (Bachruch / Budapest) can be read. This permits the conclusion that either some government organ – or maybe the manufacturer itself – released the badge uniformly. To the best of our knowledge, approximately ten examples of the badge of the Knights of the Golden Spur dubbed by Charles are to be found in private and public collections.

**One of the Knights of the Golden Spur: Aladár Münnich de Jánosvölgy
(13 August, 1890, Szepes-Igló, Hungary [now Spišská Nová Ves, Slovakia] – 7 September, 1975, Sunbury, England)**

Aladár Münnich was Reserve 1st Lieutenant at the Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian 10th Mounted Artillery Regiment at the time of his inauguration as Knight of the Golden Spur.

In 1908-1909, he volunteered for the Imperial and Royal 4th Mounted Artillery Regiment and, on 1 January, 1910, was appointed Reserve Ensign (pictured as a Reserve Officer Cadet at right). At the outbreak of the First World War, he rejoined his regiment as Reserve 2nd Lieutenant, serving until the last day. He was constantly in the line of fire; first as a reconnaissance officer; then section commander; later, first officer; for 18 months, battery commander; temporarily, battalion commander. He took part in the Battle of Lemberg, was at the centre of the Battle of Limanowa, fought in Bukovina, Volhynia, Transylvania, at the River Piave and finally Asiago. On 31 October, 1915, for his distinguished valiant stand at Rudka, he received the Bronze Military Merit Medal, on War Ribbon. The next day he was made Reserve 1st Lieutenant. On 31 March, 1916, for his courageous conduct at Bezartarnia, he won a Silver Military Merit Medal, on War Ribbon. On 31 August, he was in action again, at Karytnica: “When our lines broke, he bravely continued firing until the enemy became dangerously close. Then, in a calm ... fashion, he organised artillery and infantry fire to cover the withdrawal of his guns. He himself waited for the discharge of his fourth cannon, then ... withdrew from his firing position only as the enemy penetrated forwards.” For the above, he received a second Silver Military Merit Medal. In November 1916, in the Transylvanian (Carpathian) theatre, “our Front was blown away and breached by Russian-Romanian forces. ... Battery 2/10 was ready: with his personal energy, Münnich was the first officer to manoeuvre his battery’s field guns through almost impassable fortifications and mountains of debris – defying all nature’s obstacles and regardless of strong hostile forces. He quickly brought his battery into firing position and extensively and energetically supported the counter-attack.” He received the Military Merit Cross, 3rd Class, with War Decoration and Swords. During the Italian offensive, 15-17 June, 1918, in the mountains of Montello and Pallone “before his battery could even open fire, he already had dead and wounded casualties and it took the most heroic dashing discipline from 1st Lieutenant Münnich to get his whole team into action. Completely unthinkable. As well as endur-



ing hours of the heaviest life-threatening artillery fire, the battery also suffered three poison gas attacks but [he] energised his team with his brightest personal bravery and heroism, so the battery got carried away by his spirit, despite the heavy losses suffered, and heroically accomplished its designated task.” He was awarded the Order of the Iron Crown, 3rd Class, with War Decoration and Swords.

He was a renowned architect, designing many public and private buildings and was a member of the Public Works Council in Hungary. By the September 1945 deadline, he had also submitted his plans for the “Reconstruction Idea Call” announced by the Budapest National Committee. Being forced to leave his homeland, he settled in Canada. In 1954, he designed Montreal’s Hungarian Calvinist community church. In 1957, he was organiser and President of the Gábor Bethlen Literary and Friendship Circle of the Calvinist Church of Canada.





**Photo portrait of
Aladár Münnich wearing the insignia
of the Knights of the Golden Spur on
his wedding day, 16 January 1922.**

The Wool-Sleeved Leather Jerkin Adventure

by Peter Czink

I have been interested in military history as far back as I can remember, and as a boy, I would naturally gravitate toward every old soldier who happened to cross my path. For the most part, I had great success in coaxing their reminiscences from them, and they usually were happy to relive both their adventures and their sad memories with me. I've been very fortunate to have been able to spend time with many World War I and World War II veterans – and I even enjoyed an afternoon in Australia once with an old Boer War fighter.

There have been a few cases, however, that didn't go as well, and for whatever reasons the elder I was pestering with questions didn't wish to talk about bygone days. One of these fellows was a fine specimen of Hungarian manhood who I briefly got to know because of a chance encounter brought about by my father, who asked him to bring back some small gifts for me when he returned to Canada from a trip to his homeland.

Gyula Kasza (Gyula being a pre-Christian Hungarian given name), or "Gyuszi" (a commonly used nickname for Gyula), a towering and proud gentleman who happened to be an old friend of my father's wife and was visiting them in Miskolc; called to tell me to come around and pick up a parcel with my name on it. He lived in an immaculate little house in a fine part of Vancouver (back in the day on the outskirts of the city) and received Lorraine and I with a formality that only a former Hungarian soldier could pull off. I immediately knew that I would be asking about his military career, but thought better of it until we at least exchanged some rudimentary small talk.

He asked our forgiveness for not being able to offer any refreshments, as he was a widower, however, he lost no time in showing us the renovations he had done to his home, long ago. One of these, he mentioned, was the raising of the house in order to add a basement – a job he accomplished single-handed! Yes – he actually went about jacking up the structure, inch by inch, by himself – in the evenings and on weekends when he wasn't working.

Once that was out of the way, I thought the time was right to ask him about his military service. I flatter myself that I have developed some small amount of charm when handling this sort of thing but my cheerful inquiry went down like a lead balloon. He brusquely replied that he was indeed a soldier in the artillery and reached the rank of sergeant, however, his experiences were unpleasant. He went on to tell me about mistreatment and a whole list of things he didn't care for, which convinced me that further questioning would be a bad idea.

Despite that we had a very nice time, and when it came time to leave, he showed us other aspects of the place – a beautiful garden, pristine paintwork, and other evidence of craftsmanship, as well as his garage – packed with tools of every variety and perfectly organized. These things were just a blur to me due to something that caught my eye – a very tired looking garment hanging among garden tools, shelves of paint, and countless peg-board hooks bristling with assorted equipment. His explanations became no more than a din in my ears as I focused on this piece of antique outerwear and I suddenly interrupted him: "Hey Gyuszi *bácsi* – is that a *posztóújjas bőrmellény*?" (*Bácsi* is Hungarian for "uncle.")

He looked a little shocked, and carefully answered in the affirmative. *Posztóújjas bőrmellény* simply means "wool-sleeved leather jerkin" – a Royal Hungarian Defence Forces issue jacket that was very popular with the troops. He explained that he was lucky to get his hands on it during WWII and that it kept him warm as a POW and on his journey to Canada as well. I asked him why the sleeves, usually Hungarian Army green, were in fact brown (I thought better of mentioning the paint splatter and stainage throughout) and he explained that all garments were unceremoniously dyed that colour to distinguish prisoners of war. He then read my mind and told me what a good coverall it had been for painting, working in the garden, etc.

The leather was the consistency of cardboard, the wool sleeves moth-eaten and void any nap. The stitching was for



A group of soldiers showing off their new wool-sleeved leather jerkins.



Gyula Kasza

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the most part rotten and there were great gashes in the thing, crudely stitched up à la Frankenstein's monster. I had to have it (this was twenty years ago and my militaria collection was in its infancy)! Gingerly, I posed the question of what the chances were of him ever selling it – and was met with deep, friendly laughter – the next thing I knew he was pressing the bundle in my hands. He took us back in, rooted around in a drawer, and handed me a few old photos as well.

Off we went, treasures in hand, waving goodbye to Gyuszi bácsi – marvelling at the perfect rows of colourful delphiniums and peonies blooming at that little house that was once on the outskirts of Vancouver.

Strangely, very little information exists about the Hungarian wool-sleeved leather jerkin, despite its popularity back in the day. It was a handsome jacket, and is seen fairly frequently in old photos. It doesn't even have an official designation, as do most other pieces of official equipment, and there is only one known reference to it published in July of 1930 in the Hungarian military regulations. It was prescribed originally for customs and border troops, and later for military vehicle drivers and enlisted ranks of the anti-aircraft artillery, "along with other branches of service." It was also specified that it must be worn over the uniform tunic – the collar of which is exposed to make the wearer's rank visible.

The condition of my example was extremely poor, and for the last two decades it has remained in a box in my closet, more of a memento of Gyuszi bácsi than a piece of my collection that I would display. Recently I found myself looking for things to do during the pandemic and while going through odds and ends it surfaced again, along with other flotsam and jetsam which included remnants of a moth-eaten period greatcoat I never could bring myself to throw out. I've toyed with the idea of fixing that leather jerkin many times but it has always been a daunting pipe dream. But having it and the greatcoat bits in my hands (along with a little too much spare time) convinced me to go for it. I started with conditioning the leather, and when it was soft again, I proceeded to repair the seams and the tears. I made a pattern from one of the sleeves and replaced them with material from the greatcoat. Originally, this garment was issued with brown 25mm four-hole plastic buttons which were missing. It is known that these were sometimes replaced with more decorative Hungarian Army crown buttons, and I had just enough of them to sew onto my project.

I left the original wool lining, still dyed brown, as homage to this fine Hungarian's struggles as a POW. I am quite sure that Gyuszi bácsi would approve.



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Above: The garment before restoration.

After restoration:

The wool-sleeved leather jerkin - a three-quarter length jacket (cut longer at the front) with wool sleeves provided with adjustable straps on each cuff. Five buttons closed the front, and another secured its only pocket. It was never meant to be worn without a uniform tunic under it, the collar of which displayed the wearer's rank and would appear to be part of the garment.



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MILITARY 100 TREASURES

Selected Artefacts
from the Hungarian
Military History Institute
and Museum in
Its Centenary Year

HADTÖRTÉNETI
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100

