

My Autobiography
By László Ede Hudec
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I was born in Besztercebánya in Zólyom County on 8 January 1893. I am the son of the master builder György Hugyecz and the Kassa Lutheran minister's daughter Paula Skultéty of Alsólehota. All of my paternal and maternal ancestors were Ágosta Lutherans. My paternal ancestors were millers and farmers in Cserény and Alsómicsinye located southeast of Besztercebánya. My maternal ancestors were all Lutheran ministers traceable to Severin Skultéty of Alsólehota, who was born in Alsólehota in Zólyom County in 1565. He was a reknown Lutheran preacher and writer who defended religious freedom in the Diet.

I attended primary and secondary school in Besztercebánya, where I also received my high school diploma.

In 1910 I enrolled in the department of architecture at the Hungarian Royal Joseph Technical University in Budapest. I received my diploma in June 1914.

In 1914, at the outbreak of the war, I enlisted as a trainee in the 1st Defense Field Artillery Regiment. They transferred me to the 16th Defense Infantry Regiment in Besztercebánya. Upon completing the reserve officers training, I was ordered to Miskolc where, on 30 December 1914, I passed the reserve officer exam.

BATTLEFRONT

I went out to the Russian battlefield in February 1915 with my battalion on the march and joined my regiment as a cadet designate. My regiment was stationed north of **Forlice**. My commander was Colonel Mestic. I participated in the March attacks as a platoon leader.

Toward the end of April 1915 I was ordered to serve General Dezső Molnár of Péterfalva with the 77th Infantry Brigade commandership. If I recall correctly, that is when they transferred me to the 9th Infantry Regiment Unit (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jankovich). I was posted as Orderly Officer (fahrender Ordonanz-Offizier). But due to my civilian training (civil engineer diploma), I performed the duties of Engineer Officer for Brigade Staff Officer Captain Aladár Melzer.

On 1 May 1915 I was appointed flag-bearer.

During our advance my duties included assisting the staff officer with preparing situation reports and accompanying maps, in addition to handling the brigade's technical matters. This required daily local surveillance, so every day I sought out the brigade's first firing line and often advanced with them. After I learned Polish (I already knew Slovak and spoke fluent German), I often was the liaison officer with the neighboring German empire brigade or division commandership. Further information regarding my service at the brigade can be furnished by Lieutenant Colonel Jankovich, Commander of the 9th Regiment; Captain Némethy, Regiment Aide-de-Camp; Major László Juhász (later Lieutenant Colonel, Commander of the 16th Infantry Regiment); Lieutenant Colonel Nikolich, Commander of the 11th Regiment (later Lieutenant General and Under-Secretary of the Defense Ministry); First Lieutenant Zoltán Kozma, Regiment Aid-de-Camp (Lieutenant Colonel since 1935); gallant Infantry Captain Árpád Sipos,

former orderly officer of the Army's Chief Commander.

On 2 June 1915, during our advance, I was decorated with a minor silver medal of courage.

The 39th Infantry Division (Lieutenant General Hadfy and Chief of Staff staff Lieutenant Colonel Balassa), whose unit included the 77th Infantry Brigade, advanced until Brest-Litovsk. The division marched from here to Lemberg.

In September 1915, the division was taken to the Stripa River, and we headed south in military formation from Burkanow to **Kotusow-Zarvanica**. The formation marched along the hill-line on the eastern side of the Stripa. There was entrenched warfare here. My main responsibility in the building of positions was to provide expert leadership in the construction of steel concrete posts for machine guns and searchlights. At night, I similarly managed the construction of machine gun posts for the advanced outposts. Before we finished building our positions, this period of tranquility ceased

on 11 October 1915 with a sudden Russian attack. This highly violent attack was accomplished with superior force and broke our line of defense early in the morning at a 4-kilometer section of the 11th and 9th Regiments. Moreover, the Russians also seized elevation 382 which overlooked the section of the Stripa Valley where our division was located. At this time, I was serving temporary duty at the division's commandership because one of the staff officers, Captain Sipos, was on leave, and the other staff officer unexpectedly had to be transported to hospital for typhoid fever. General Molnár, who was standing in for the division commander, summoned me from the brigade commandership since my previous assignments familiarized me well with the terrain, the front, and all of its communication trenches, back lines, and advance posts. Being an architect, I also could draw maps quickly. In the afternoon of the break-through, Sir Major von Majejac from the division commandership arrived to investigate the break-through and to ascertain the situation.

MILITARY FEAT WORTHY OF MENTION

I escorted Sir Major von Majejac from the division commandership. I also received orders from Lieutenant Colonel Balassa, division Chief of Staff, to go to elevation 382, if at all possible, in order to ascertain the circumstances of the break-through and to determine our own troop or Russian troop presence there. All communications with the 9th and 11th Regiments had been cut off, and it was impossible to form a clear picture of the situation. I led Sir Major von Majejac to the base of elevation 382. At this time, certain companies of the 57th Imperial and Royal Regiment – a division reserve – were developing into counter-attack formation in order to close the gap and advance to point 382. One company mistook their direction in the valley and, caught in heavy artillery and machine gun flank fire, were in danger of annihilation. Noticing this, I ran across the valley. After reaching the company, I stepped in for the wounded company commander and led them across a barren area toward elevation 382. Thus, we succeeded in stopping the other recoiling companies of the 57th Imperial and Royal Regiment. Because I knew the terrain as well as the palm of my hand, this company of the 57th Regiment was able to advance within close range of the Russians by way of the communication trenches and back lines. We suffered very few casualties and drove back the Russians who were lost in the labyrinth of trenches. Unfortunately, our biggest achievement was that point 382 was occupied partly by us and partly by the Russians. Our entrenchments were 30 steps apart and hooked in clasp-like manner. I surveyed the situation, returned via the same route, and conveyed my report to Sir Major von Majejac who was joined later by Captain Molnár and Orderly Officer Cavalry First Lieutenant Sándor Stranyavsky (Chairman of Parliament and retired Minister of Agriculture after 1938) who also witnessed the event. On the orders of Captain Molnár,

I stayed at the base of hill 382 to assist the ranking officer of the dismounted cavalry and other troops that arrived on time in setting up a second line of defense. At night when I returned to the division commandership Staff Officer Sir Major von Majevac shook my hand and said, "I am deeply grateful for your actions, you have behaved in exemplary fashion." This acknowledgement caused me much pleasure, and I thought the matter to be done with without attributing to it special importance, this being merely one episode of the fulfillment of my duties. For this reason, I was especially surprised when one day at the end of autumn Commander of Army Corps Sir Arz under the escort of Sir Major von Majevac arrived at the division commandership and, accompanied by a speech, presented me with a major silver medal of courage in front of all present officers and division reserves. He informed me of his order to recommend my promotion to lieutenant. I have attached as Appendix 1 the copy of extraordinary promotion request number Op.No.438/10 of 15 October 1915, which I received later. His Excellency Sándor Stranyavsky offered to attest to the above said at any time.

In the beginning of winter 1915 I received two weeks vacation. After my vacation I was transferred to the unit of the 20th Infantry Regiment, and I joined the regiment located northeast of Luzk in Wolhinia. Here I was posted to the 82nd Brigade commandership, whose commander later became Sir Captain Molnár, at this time temporary commander of the 44th Division. At the 82nd Brigade commandership I worked alongside Staff Officer Captain Béla Hedry (currently a retired Field Marshal) as engineer officer, the same post I held in the 77th Brigade. During this time I devised new steel concrete posts for machine guns and cannons, and I led their construction at the front. Moreover, since the trench posts led through marshland thus making it impossible to dig trenches and underground shelters, I built anti-barrage shelters using tracks from the existing railroad line. Regiments neighboring our division often borrowed me to build them similar arrangements. After I fulfilled my duties, I joined my regiment again in April. At this time Sir Captain Molnár accorded me praise in brigade order **1022** written on 3 May 1916, the copy of which I have attached in Appendix 2. My regimental commander was Lieutenant-Colonel Bugsch. I joined the regiment's 11th Company, located at the railroad crossing and including the advanced officer field outpost. I was often their commander. Inasmuch as we succeeded in repelling the Russians' attacks, I was luckier than many of my fellow-soldiers who were slaughtered or taken prisoner during Russian surprise attacks on the field outpost. Besides such outpost skirmishes, there was extraordinary calm on this front until the beginning of June, when the Russians broke through the front south of us at the level of Luck and rapidly pressed westward.

CAPTIVITY

On 6 June 1916 our division received orders to retreat toward the northwest. We had to leave behind our entrenchments that we had so diligently built lest we fall into Russian hands. From the morning of 6 June we marched for 24 hours straight until 7 June, when after a half-hour break I received orders to find out if the enemy was advancing and if so, with what force and in which direction. The terrain was grassland, marshland, and later forest. Our maps of this region were quite unreliable. For this reason, the choice fell on me, as I was the sole officer among the pure Hungarian regiment who spoke the native population's language. In addition to Polish, I also learned the region's language of Ukrainian. I chose 20 of my most reliable men, and so that we could cross the stream, I took with me wood, which we used to build light bridges. At the first town I recruited a Ukrainian guide who was of great assistance to us in the maze of streams and marshland. Advancing in the direction given by the order, I did not come upon any enemy, and neither did my patrols dispatched toward the right and left wings. Around

11 o'clock we stumbled upon a Russian caravan and ammunition carts escorted by Cossacks. We quickly retreated to the woods. It was clear that we reached the enemy's flank, and now we did our best to return to our firing line the same way we came. Unfortunately, the Cossacks detected us and the shooting began. This prevented us from going through the grasslands, so we attempted to return in the northwestward direction through the marshland and woods only. We almost succeeded with the few patrols I had left, for the other patrols, collapsing in exhaustion, fell behind. As I had mentioned, we marched non-stop for 24 hours the day before with little rest. We played hide-and-seek with the Cossacks who, joined by more Cossack patrols, chased us. We were about halfway to our entrenchments when we had to cross a small clearing to reach the shelter of another woods. That is when the advancing Cossacks attacked from all sides and knocked us down. I collapsed due to a strike on the head.