



By Sabre and Steed: The Hussar Ethos and its Strategic Application in the Modern Era

Mátyás Vajda
Norbert Szári
Gergely Szűcs

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Authors:
Mátyás Vajda, Norbert Szári, and Gergely Szűcs

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Dániel Farkas

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About the Danube Institute

The Danube Institute, established in 2013 by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation in Budapest, serves as a hub for the exchange of ideas and individuals within Central Europe and between Central Europe, other parts of Europe, and the English-speaking world. Rooted in a commitment to respectful conservatism in cultural, religious, and social life, the Institute also upholds the broad classical liberal tradition in economics and a realistic Atlanticism in national security policy. These guiding principles are complemented by a dedication to exploring the interplay between democracy and patriotism, emphasizing the nation-state as the cornerstone of democratic governance and international cooperation.

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About the Authors



Mátyás Vajda is an energy policy expert specialising in oil, natural gas, and nuclear energy, with professional experience spanning government policy, economic diplomacy, and international negotiations at both EU and multilateral levels. He has also worked in cultural diplomacy in Germany and France and regularly lectures at institutions such as the Civic Hungary Foundation, Hungarian Heritage House, the Fonó, and the Liszt Institute. Alongside his policy work, Vajda is deeply engaged in Hungarian traditional culture and folk music, having participated in ethnographic fieldwork in Transylvania and the Far East. He is a member of the Üsztűrű Ensemble, one of the most recognised Hungarian folk music groups in the Carpathian Basin, and has contributed to multiple recordings and albums. He holds a degree in international relations with an economic specialisation, as well as qualifications in economic diplomacy.



Norbert Szári graduated from Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, in 2010, having majored in History and German Studies. During his university studies, he received a scholarship to the Karl Ruprecht University, Heidelberg. Between 2014 and 2018, he worked as a researcher at The Committee of National Remembrance in Budapest. Since 2022, he has studied at the Doctoral School of Military Science at the Ludovika University of Public Service in Budapest. His interests focus on military science, geopolitics and security policy. His dissertation focuses on the geopolitical challenges facing Hungary and East Central Europe in the twenty-first century.



Gergely Szűcs is a Hungarian-American who completed an LL.B. at VU Amsterdam in the Netherlands and a completed the Saint Thomas Aquinas Ecumenical Academy for Public Life. Then worked for the Aquinói Szent Tamás Közéleti Egyesület (Saint Thomas Aquinas Public Life Association). He is currently completing his MA degree in International Water Governance and Water Diplomacy at the University of Public Service. His main research interests are water conflict, international water law, fluvial and maritime trade, related natural resources, irrigation and offshore pipelines. Szűcs also focuses on Hungarian culture while bridging diaspora realities.

Abstract

The hussar occupies a unique place in both Hungarian history and the wider military heritage of Europe. Emerging from the frontier conditions of the medieval and early modern Kingdom of Hungary, the hussar developed into one of the most influential models of light cavalry, while simultaneously becoming a lasting symbol of courage, mobility, service and national identity. This paper traces the historical evolution of the hussar from its origins to its international expansion, examining not only its military roles over time but also the broader cultural world from which it emerged. Particular attention is given to the relationship between horse culture, frontier society, folk traditions, faith and the distinctive mentality that shaped the hussar ethos. Building upon this historical foundation, the paper argues that the enduring international legacy of the hussar offers opportunities for cultural dialogue and soft-power cooperation rooted in a shared Hungarian heritage. Rather than treating the hussar merely as a romantic military figure, the study presents it as a historical and cultural tradition whose values continue to possess relevance beyond the battlefield.

Rein in hand, steps his mare down lane,

A lone hussar in Alföld's plain;

The sun is faint and shadows long,

The battle lost, in sorrow song.

Stained his clothes are, once green and red,

For King and Country he has bled.

Yet no matter his plight or need,

He proudly sits upon his steed.¹

An Introduction to the Hussars

Introduction

The harsher qualities often associated with Hungarian historical self-perception — its dry resilience, improvisational instinct, restrained dignity and self-reflective, sharp humor — did not emerge from courts or cities, but from the ordinary people of the plains and borderlands: those who looked toward the same sky both in prayer and in fear, receiving blessing and destruction alike from above. In many ways the hussar emerged from this exact world — not merely as a military figure, but as the expression of a mentality shaped by instability, endurance and the necessity of constant readiness.

The hussar is a colorful soldier. His clothes are vibrant, his mustache is sharp and his spirit is free and bold. He is in essence the child of the steppe and carries the deepest of Hungarian characters. Before the figure of the hussar becomes overly romanticized or mythologized, these qualities often emerge from surprisingly simple human realities: honesty, inner dignity, endurance and the kind of moral posture that once belonged naturally to a harsher and now slowly disappearing world. This is notably connected to the horsemen's culture brought to the Carpathian Basin from the wide plains.

A hussar encapsulates this tradition remarkably well, almost serving as a time capsule for it. Importantly, he is a dancing soldier. The hussar almost fought like a dancer. This was not because warfare itself was beautiful, but because survival on horseback demanded instinct, balance, timing and movement that bordered on improvisation. He dances in life, just as he fiercely cuts through the enemy during battle, as a well-trained warrior. He is quick. He penetrates the back of the lines and wreaks havoc and confusion, then is gone with the wind. Like the winds of the plains, the hussar relied less on weight than on momentum. Thus is the hussar, and thus is the Hungarian of old.

Over time the hussar became one of the most recognizable international expressions of Hungarian military culture. As hussar traditions spread across Europe, fragments of the historical frontier mentality from which they had originally emerged spread with them as well. The significance of this legacy lies not merely in military history itself, but also in the possibility of cultural continuity and historical connection that these traditions continue to preserve even today. The purpose of this paper therefore is not simply to romanticize the past, but to examine how the historical and cultural afterlife of the hussar may still contribute to forms of international cultural understanding and cooperation in the modern world.

The hussar tradition is a unique contribution made by Hungarians to the world and it carries a spark of the Hungarian soul till this day. Anywhere where there are hussars a kernel of 'Hungarianness' resides in those soldiers. Given the vast range of the culture, it is a notable tradition, maybe even the most widespread Hungarian mark upon the world. Very few remarkably and wholly Hungarian rooted things left such a magnificent and living legacy in so many places. The exploration of this notion is the goal of this paper. The work is not just a veneration of Hungarian culture and history, it wants to serve as a groundwork for strategic cooperation based on common principles.

The Hussar's Etymological Origin and Historical Development

The history of the hussar stretches across centuries of Hungarian military development and reflects the transformation of warfare itself: the history is also intertwined closely with how cultural idealization and symbolism was reshaped. Though the hussar later became associated with aristocratic cavalry culture, elaborate uniforms and romantic military imagery across Europe, its origins were shaped by far harsher military realities during the last five hundred years.



The exact origin of the word “hussar” remains disputed among historians and linguists to this day.² One of the most widespread interpretations derives from the word of the Hungarian “húsz,” meaning twenty and from the word “ár”, which is a suffix often used to describe trades. According to this theory of Berkó István, one mounted soldier had to be equipped and provided for every twenty peasant households. This explanation became deeply embedded within Hungarian historical memory because it tied the hussar directly to the military organization of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom.³

Another major, not too popular theory places the origin of the word within the Balkan and southern Slavic linguistic sphere. Variants such as “gusar,” “husar,” or similar forms were connected to raiders, irregular mounted fighters or frontier warriors operating throughout the unstable Balkan regions during the late medieval period. Some historians of the early twentieth century argued that the term itself entered Hungarian usage from this southern environment. Yet even among those scholars, an important distinction remained necessary: the linguistic origin of the word itself does not automatically determine the origin of the military institution behind it.⁴

The reputation of fast-moving Hungarian mounted warfare had already become deeply embedded within the medieval European imagination centuries earlier, reflected in the often-cited phrase: “Sagittis Hungarorum libera nos Domine” – “Lord save us from the arrows of the Hungarians.”⁵ Medieval chroniclers and western sources frequently described the speed and mobility of Hungarian mounted warfare with admiration, and also with fear. Yet it would be historically inaccurate to claim that the hussar directly descended unchanged from the mounted warriors of the conquest period.

There was continuity in cavalry culture, mobility and horseback warfare, but the hussar itself was probably a later military development born from entirely different strategic circumstances.⁶ As János Szabó also emphasizes in his broader examination of Central European light cavalry development, mounted warfare in Hungary evolved through several distinct military phases shaped by changing frontier conditions, military technologies and defensive necessities rather than through a single uninterrupted cavalry tradition.⁷

This environment from which the hussar emerged was the unstable southern frontier of the Kingdom of Hungary during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, particularly following the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and the accelerating Ottoman expansion into the Balkans. Ottoman expansion fundamentally transformed warfare in Central and Southeastern Europe. By the time of Sigismund of Luxemburg and later – in the mid-15th Century – János Hunyadi, the Kingdom of Hungary had increasingly become a frontier state standing between the Ottoman sphere and Central Europe. Raids, rapid incursions, reconnaissance missions and sudden cavalry strikes became constant features of military life.

Entire regions of the southern borderlands lived under the perpetual possibility of attack. Warfare ceased to be seasonal or ceremonial and became continuous.⁸ Under these conditions the traditional heavy cavalry of western medieval warfare became less effective on its own. Armor and direct shock combat still remained important, yet mobility and combined tactical arms increasingly determined the outcomes. The southern frontier demanded soldiers capable of rapid movement across large distances, sudden attacks, reconnaissance operations and flexible responses to fast-moving Ottoman raiding forces.

Similar military functions increasingly appeared across other peripheral defensive regions of the Kingdom of Hungary as well, including among certain Székely frontier formations whose organization likewise emphasized mobility, rapid response and border defense. These early hussars excelled in scouting enemy territory, disrupting supply lines, pursuing retreating forces and launching sudden attacks across difficult terrain. Rather than functioning merely as battlefield cavalry in the western knightly sense, they became highly adaptable frontier troops shaped by the realities of near constant border warfare.

During the campaigns of János Hunyadi these mounted forces gained increasing importance. Hunyadi’s wars against the Ottomans required rapid troop movements and flexible military responses throughout the Balkans and the southern defensive system of Hungary. The campaigns conducted around Belgrade and along the Danube frontier demonstrated the growing importance of mobile cavalry capable of reacting quickly against Ottoman maneuver warfare.

By the reign of King Matthias (1458-1490), the hussars had already become a more organized and recognizable element within Hungarian warfare.⁹ The military reforms associated with the Black Army (i.e. the Hungarian mercenary force active in the latter half of the 15th Century) further strengthened the role of lighter cavalry formations within the kingdom's military structure. Probably Matthias understood that warfare was changing continuously and more rapidly than ever before in Central Europe.

Firearms increasingly transformed infantry warfare, while large mercenary armies reshaped the foundations of military effectiveness itself. The decisive factors of warfare increasingly lay not merely in numbers, but in technology, tactical innovation and the efficient organization of armed forces. Yet despite these changes, light cavalry remained indispensable within the Hungarian military system because of the unique strategic environment in which the kingdom still operated. The hussar became Hungary's sharp, one-word answer to this strategic reality.

The Military Frontier and the Kuruc Legacy

The catastrophe of Mohács in 1526, where the Hungarian army suffered a decisive defeat against the advancing Ottoman Empire and King Lajos II. was killed, marked the collapse of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary as an independent regional power. In the following decades the country was divided into Ottoman-occupied central territories, Habsburg Royal Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania, a political fragmentation that further increased the importance of light cavalry warfare.¹⁰

In many ways the military structure of Hungary itself adapted to the realities of permanent border warfare. Fortress systems, mobile cavalry operations and smaller rapid engagements increasingly replaced the earlier medieval model of warfare, which was based on seasonally mobilized feudal forces concentrated for major campaigns and decisive battles.

By contrast, the Ottoman frontier required continuous military readiness, rapid response capabilities and constant low-intensity conflict across a vast border zone. Under these conditions the hussar became one of the defining military figures of Hungarian warfare. The previously mentioned attribute of mobility made them indispensable not only in combat itself, but also in communication, reconnaissance and territorial defense across the world of divided borderlands.

The military frontier world that emerged after Mohács produced not only new forms of warfare but also a distinct military culture that would later become closely associated with the hussar. During the seventeenth century and early eighteenth centuries, particularly throughout the anti-Habsburg uprisings of Imre Thököly (1678-1685) and later Ferenc II. Rákóczi (1703-1711), light cavalry, became one of the most important military instruments of Hungarian resistance.

It was during this period that the term *kuruc* (i.e. rebel or freedom fighter) became closely associated in contemporary usage with Hungarian anti-Habsburg insurgents, especially light cavalymen and irregular mounted fighters. Later etymological interpretations generally derive the word from the Turkish *kurudsch* ("insurgent"), although the term's historical usage was shaped above all by its association with armed resistance against Habsburg rule. The kuruc forces relied heavily upon mobility, rapid raids, reconnaissance, surprise attacks and operational flexibility, all of which reflected the realities of warfare across the divided territories of Royal Hungary, Ottoman Hungary and Transylvania.¹¹

Although the hussar as a military institution had already existed for centuries, the kuruc period contributed significantly to the formation of its later symbolic image. The lightly equipped horseman fighting for freedom, operating independently across vast distances and combining military skill with strong personal initiative became deeply embedded in Hungarian historical memory.¹²

Many of the virtues later associated with the classical hussar — courage, adaptability, self-reliance and a certain defiant spirit — were reinforced through the experiences of the kuruc wars. In this sense the Thököly and Rákóczi movements may be regarded as an important transitional stage between the frontier cavalry traditions of the Ottoman borderlands and the internationally renowned hussar formations of the eighteenth century.¹³

The kuruc era also strengthened the cultural association between mounted warfare and Hungarian identity. Long before the hussar became a fashionable cavalryman of European courts, he had already become a symbol of endurance, autonomy and resistance within Hungarian historical consciousness.

In this respect, the relationship between Hungarian national character and hussar spirit did not emerge primarily from later romantic nationalism, but from the lived historical experience of frontier warfare, political struggle and survival in a world of divided borderlands.

European Expansion and the Golden Age of the Hussar

Over time the military reputation of the Hungarian hussars spread across Europe. Hussar formations were first incorporated into the armies of the Habsburg Monarchy, where large numbers of Hungarian cavalymen continued to serve, before being adopted more broadly by other European powers. France, Prussia, Austria and eventually Russia integrated hussar units into their armies.

Among the most well-known figures of hussar warfare was László Bercsényi, who entered French service following the collapse of Rákóczi's War of Independence, later rose to the rank of Marshal of France and became one of the most renowned hussar commanders of eighteenth-century Europe.¹⁴ The famous Bercsényi Hussars of France became one of the clearest examples of how a distinctly Hungarian military tradition evolved into an internationally admired cavalry model.

Over time the military methods and symbolic prestige associated with the hussar spread far beyond Hungary itself and became integrated into the military traditions of numerous European states. Yet despite this international spread, the origins of the hussar remained deeply tied to the military frontier society of the Kingdom of Hungary. Later, the romanticization of the hussar across Europe often blurred these origins. What had originally emerged from the unstable military frontier of the Kingdom of Hungary gradually became one of the most recognizable cavalry models of European warfare.

By the eighteenth century, however, hussar formations increasingly became absorbed into centralized and professionalized standing armies. The irregular frontier warrior slowly evolved into a more disciplined and institutionalized military figure. This transformation reflected the growing centralization and professionalization of European military systems.¹⁵

Despite this institutionalization, the hussar preserved many elements of its earlier military mentality. Aggressive reconnaissance, operational independence, rapid maneuvering and psychological pressure upon enemy forces remained defining characteristics of hussar warfare throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁶

Yet the international success of the hussar tradition was accompanied by growing tensions within the Habsburg military system itself. Few contemporary commanders described these problems more clearly than Field Marshal András Hadik, whose writings provide a unique insight into both the transformation of eighteenth-century warfare and the challenges facing the Hungarian hussars.

Contrary to the widespread assumption that the declining performance of imperial hussar units reflected shortcomings among the soldiers themselves, Hadik repeatedly argued that the principal problem lay in the way they were employed. Reflecting on his own wartime experience, he criticized the continued practice of launching hussars directly against artillery positions, noting that he had personally witnessed attacks in which fifty to one hundred men were lost within moments to cannon and canister fire. Such employment not only wasted experienced cavalymen but also undermined the morale of newly recruited soldiers, who subsequently became reluctant to perform their duties when genuinely needed.¹⁷

For Hadik, however, the problem went much deeper than outdated tactical methods. He observed that imperial hussars were frequently detached far from the main army and expected to operate independently, often without adequate logistical support, proper equipment, sufficient horse stocks, or protection from other branches of the military. While the Prussians increasingly employed their hussars in cooperation with heavy cavalry, infantry and artillery, the imperial command continued to use them according to older principles that no longer corresponded to the realities of contemporary warfare. As a result, even successful attacks against enemy cavalry often drove the hussars directly into concentrated infantry and artillery fire, leaving them isolated and unsupported far from friendly forces.



In Hadik's assessment, the issue was therefore not the quality of the Hungarian hussars but the failure of the military system to adapt their employment to changing operational conditions.¹⁸

At the same time, Hadik believed that the growing centralization of the Habsburg army created a cultural disconnect between the military institution and the social environment from which the hussars emerged. The increasing emphasis on rigid German-style discipline, standardized drill and German-language command structures often failed to account for the traditions, customs and mentality of Hungarian light cavalry.

According to Hadik, effective leadership required more than regulations and punishment; it also demanded personal authority, practical judgement and an understanding of the men themselves.¹⁹ Unlike many contemporary officers, he frequently communicated with his hussars in Hungarian and cultivated unusually strong bonds of loyalty with both officers and common soldiers. Contemporary accounts recall that during one campaign thirty hussars secretly left the units to which they had been reassigned and made their way back to Hadik, choosing to risk punishment rather than serve under another commander.²⁰

Hadik furthermore argued that the increasing bureaucratization of military life discouraged many capable officers from remaining in service, while recruitment practices failed to draw sufficiently upon the broader Hungarian regions that had historically sustained the hussar tradition. He therefore opposed the suspension of free hussar recruitment, maintaining that the effectiveness of light cavalry depended upon recruiting from populations with long-standing martial traditions and experience in irregular warfare. Rather than accepting an undifferentiated system of recruitment for all branches of the army, he defended the older practice of free hussar recruitment, which preserved the connection between Hungarian light cavalry and the social milieu from which it had traditionally drawn its manpower.²¹

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Hadik's thought concerns the relationship between military effectiveness and national character. In his view, different peoples possessed different natural inclinations for particular forms of military service. Whereas Croats, Slavonians and Romanians were generally more suited to infantry service, Hungarians and Székelys displayed a particular aptitude and preference for hussar warfare.

More broadly, Hadik argued that successful states recognized and utilized the distinctive qualities inherent within different nations, adapting institutions to the character of the people rather than attempting to suppress it. His observations therefore connect the hussar not merely to a military function but to a broader martial culture rooted in the historical experience of the Hungarian frontier world. In this sense, the enduring effectiveness of the hussar rested not only upon tactical doctrine or military organization, but also upon the preservation of the social traditions, cultural habits and forms of initiative that had shaped Hungarian light cavalry for centuries.

If Hadik represented the adaptation of the hussar tradition to the changing realities of eighteenth-century warfare, the Napoleonic era marked the culmination of that development. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the hussar had become one of the most prestigious cavalry types in Europe. What had originated as a distinctly Hungarian frontier military tradition was now regarded across the continent as the ideal model of light cavalry warfare. The qualities that had made the hussars successful for centuries—mobility, reconnaissance, operational independence, rapid maneuver and aggressive pursuit—remained indispensable in the large-scale campaigns of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

The importance of the hussars during this period extended far beyond their traditional scouting functions. They screened advancing armies, secured flanks, conducted reconnaissance in force, protected lines of communication, pursued defeated enemies and covered strategic withdrawals. In many campaigns they became indispensable instruments of operational mobility, linking battlefield success with strategic exploitation. Even as European armies grew larger and increasingly professionalized, the hussar retained the flexibility and initiative that had characterized the frontier cavalry traditions from which the arm had originally emerged.

The Napoleonic era marked perhaps the peak of the hussar's international prestige. By this time the hussar no longer represented merely a tactical cavalry function, but an entire military aesthetic and psychological image associated with boldness, speed, aggressiveness and elite light cavalry culture. Elaborate dolmans (i.e. sleeves), braided uniforms, pelisses (i.e. jackets) and curved sabers transformed the hussar into one of the most iconic military figures of nineteenth century Europe.

In many armies, particularly in Western Europe, the symbolic image of the hussar increasingly acquired a cultural significance that extended beyond its battlefield role itself.

This process had already begun during the eighteenth century. In 1760 Maria Theresa established the Hungarian Noble Guard, later known as the Hungarian Royal Bodyguard, recruiting its members exclusively from the Hungarian nobility. While primarily a ceremonial institution, its dress, mounted traditions and martial ethos drew heavily upon the prestige and symbolism of the Hungarian hussar.

The characteristic dolman, pelisse and elaborate braiding associated with hussar uniforms gradually became some of the most recognizable visual symbols of Hungarian military culture and would later influence cavalry traditions throughout Europe. By this period the hussar had begun to evolve beyond a purely military function and increasingly became a symbol of elite cavalry culture, aristocratic martial virtue and military prestige.

The Napoleonic period also represented the high point of the hussar's international expansion. During the wars between 1792 and 1815, hussar formations expanded rapidly across Europe. France alone increased the number of its hussar regiments from six to fourteen,²² while Prussia, Austria, Russia and numerous smaller states continued to establish or enlarge their own hussar forces.²³

What had once been a specifically Hungarian military institution evolved into a continental phenomenon. The hussar uniform, tactical methods and martial ethos became objects of admiration and imitation from the Iberian Peninsula to the Russian Empire.²⁴

Yet this remarkable international success did not erase the Hungarian roots of the tradition. On the contrary, many of the most celebrated hussar commanders, officers and military innovators of the age continued to originate from the lands of the Hungarian Crown. The Napoleonic era therefore represented both the culmination of the hussar's Europeanization and the final confirmation of the military model that had emerged centuries earlier on the frontier zones of the Kingdom of Hungary.

The International Legacy of the Hussar

The remarkable expansion of the hussar during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries left a lasting imprint upon the military cultures of numerous states. What had originally emerged along the frontier zones of the Kingdom of Hungary gradually evolved into one of the most widely adopted cavalry traditions in Europe. Although national variants developed distinct characteristics of their own, most retained elements of the mobility, initiative, martial ethos and symbolism that had made the Hungarian hussars famous.

Poland provides perhaps the most celebrated example of this transformation. Under Stephen Báthory (Báthory István), Prince of Transylvania and King of Poland (1576–1586), the hussar arm was reorganized and strengthened, eventually evolving into the legendary Winged Hussars. Their charge at Vienna in 1683 secured a lasting place in both Polish and European historical memory.²⁵

Elsewhere, the influence of Hungarian cavalry traditions spread through both direct military transfer and institutional imitation. In Prussia, Hungarian officers and troopers contributed to the development of what later became one of Europe's most effective light cavalry arms, culminating in the famous Death's Head Hussars.²⁶ In France, émigré officers such as László Bercsényi helped transform hussars into a permanent branch of the French Army, making the Hungarian model one of the defining cavalry traditions of the eighteenth century.²⁷ During the Napoleonic Wars, hussar regiments could be found in virtually every major European army.

The prestige of the Hungarian hussars extended beyond continental Europe. British cavalry reformers studied Hungarian methods of reconnaissance and irregular warfare, while several Light Dragoon regiments were redesignated as hussars in 1806.²⁸ Russia likewise adopted the hussar tradition during the eighteenth century, drawing upon the experience of émigré officers from Central and South-Eastern Europe, including former kuruc veterans such as Ádám Máriássy, whose service contributed to the development of the Russian hussar arm.²⁹

Across the Atlantic, Michael Kováts de Fabriczy became one of the founding figures of American cavalry during the War of Independence, introducing principles derived from Hungarian hussar warfare into the Continental Army.³⁰

By the late eighteenth century, hussar symbolism had become so prestigious that it influenced elite military and court culture across Europe, a process reflected in institutions such as the Hungarian Noble Guard established by Maria Theresa. Denmark provides one of the most enduring examples of this legacy. The modern Gardehusarregiment continues to preserve elements of Hungarian cavalry heritage and remains among the oldest active hussar formations in the world.³¹

By the nineteenth century, the hussar had become far more than a military institution. What had originated as a frontier cavalryman of the Kingdom of Hungary evolved into a shared European military symbol whose influence extended from Poland and France to Britain, Russia, Denmark and the United States. Few military traditions of specifically Hungarian origin achieved such a wide and enduring international legacy.

The Age of Industrial Warfare

Yet the international diffusion of the hussar tradition did not represent the final chapter of its history. The same military world that had carried the hussar across Europe was, by the early twentieth century, approaching a fundamental transformation. The battlefield conditions that had shaped hussar warfare for centuries were about to be altered beyond recognition by the realities of industrialized conflict.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the hussar increasingly existed within a military world fundamentally different from the one that had originally created it. Although hussar formations continued to serve in numerous European armies, tracing their subsequent development in every national context would require a separate study in itself.

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy therefore provides a particularly useful point of reference, not only because Hungary was the historical cradle of the hussar tradition, but also because the imperial and royal hussar regiments preserved many of its original institutional and cultural characteristics longer than most of their foreign counterparts.

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy still preserved large cavalry formations and maintained hussar regiments as prestigious elements of the imperial military structure. Yet beneath the ceremonial continuity and preserved traditions, the logic of warfare itself had already begun to shift decisively away from the battlefield conditions upon which cavalry supremacy had once depended.

Within the Dual Monarchy the hussars still occupied a uniquely prestigious position, particularly inside the Hungarian Honvéd system where cavalry traditions preserved strong connections to Hungarian military identity and aristocratic officer culture. Even the structure of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces reflected this partially preserved historical continuity. The cavalry branch remained divided among hussars, uhlans and dragoons, while Hungarian hussar regiments continued to function as some of the most recognizable mounted formations of the empire.³²

Yet the military reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increasingly revealed the growing tension between inherited cavalry doctrine and industrialized warfare. The Austro-Hungarian army underwent repeated organizational restructuring, force expansion and modernization programs in the decades preceding the First World War. Rail mobilization, artillery expansion, reserve systems and mass infantry formations gradually became more strategically decisive than the operational mobility of mounted troops. Cavalry still retained reconnaissance and communication functions, but its independent battlefield dominance was significantly weakened.

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the Austro-Hungarian army still entered the conflict with sixteen active hussar regiments alongside dragoon and uhlan formations. However the military leadership continued to expect cavalry units to perform the old communication duties and exploitation operations following breakthroughs, the realities of industrialized warfare rapidly undermined these expectations.

Trench systems, machine guns, concentrated artillery fire and increasingly static fronts drastically restricted the operational environment in which traditional cavalry had historically functioned.³³ Of course, hussar formations did not disappear at once, nor did cavalry instantly become irrelevant.



Mounted units still fulfilled operational and logistical functions during the early phases of the war, particularly on more fluid fronts in the east. Yet the growing effectiveness of machine guns, rapid-fire artillery and entrenched defensive positions steadily reduced the battlefield role of traditional cavalry. Hussar regiments were increasingly employed in reconnaissance and security duties, while in many engagements they fought dismounted as infantry.

In November 1914, for example, elements of the Imperial and Royal 12th Nádor Hussar Regiment served as a dismounted rearguard during the fighting at Cirókaófalú, illustrating how rapidly the realities of modern warfare were transforming the role of cavalry.³⁴ Later it became undeniably clear that the people, the world and warfare itself had been irreversibly changed. Mechanized warfare, mass firepower and industrialized military organization increasingly replaced the strategic world that had originally produced the hussar centuries earlier. Together with the hussars, an entire strategic world, military mentality and vision of warfare slowly died in the mud in a form of conflict that no longer resembled the wars from which they had originally emerged.

Yet the story of the hussar did not end in the trenches of the First World War. In Eastern and Central Europe, cavalry formations continued to serve well into the twentieth century, adapting to changing military realities.

In Hungary, the hussar tradition survived throughout the interwar period and remained an important component of the Royal Hungarian Army. During the Second World War, Hungarian cavalry formations continued to demonstrate their military value on the Eastern Front, particularly in reconnaissance, screening and mobile operations, even as mechanization increasingly transformed the nature of warfare.³⁵

The 1st Cavalry Division—later redesignated as the Hussar Division—continued to fight on the Eastern Front, combining traditional mounted elements with modern weapons, armoured vehicles and mechanized support. Even in 1944, the division still contained three hussar regiments, demonstrating that the cavalry arm had not yet entirely disappeared from the battlefield.³⁶ The final institutional end of the Hungarian hussars came only in 1949, when the new communist regime abolished the cavalry arm altogether, bringing to a close a military tradition that had endured for nearly six centuries.

In many ways the two World Wars did not destroy the hussar definitively. Rather, they exposed the fact that the historical environment from which the hussar had emerged no longer existed. What survived after this transformation was not primarily the battlefield institution itself, but the cultural memory, symbolism and historical identity attached to it.

"For King and Country": Ethos and Hussar Identity

Hussar Spirit

It is perhaps almost impossible to fully grasp the emotional and spiritual reality of the hussar. Yet if one still attempts to do so, it becomes necessary to step back and observe the broader archaic world from which the hussar emerged, and the manner in which the older Hungarian way of life resonated together with nature, suffering, joy, faith, music and historical existence itself.

Perhaps the emotional reality of the Hungarian people can be grasped most deeply through its songs, which remain almost inexhaustibly rich in both musical structure and emotional depth. In many ways Hungarian folk music preserved forms of emotional expression that remained remarkably untouched by ideological frameworks or artificial cultural stylization.

Within Hungarian culture singing occupied a uniquely important place in the experience of everyday life itself. Almost every stage of life, historical experience and human emotion possessed its own melodies and songs. Hungarians sang both in sorrow and in joy. Though these traditions still survive today in a sense, the older community-based world from which they emerged is slowly fading away, therefore its function also changes. The growing speed of modern existence, the distance and the gradual weakening of deeper communal and human ties have eroded the everyday environment in which such songs once lived naturally.

Throughout centuries Hungarian rural culture preserved an immense body of songs accompanying nearly every aspect of human existence. The melodies, rhythms and lyrics of Hungarian folk songs often reflected their historical age, at times portraying the atmosphere of entire historical periods more faithfully than written historical descriptions.

The origins of many of these songs stemmed primarily from the poorer layers of society, yet among them survived a remarkably rich tradition of military folk songs as well. Soldier songs, farewell songs, mourning songs, recruiting songs, marching songs, battle songs, prisoner songs and the so-called "bujdosó" traditions all became deeply embedded within Hungarian cultural memory.

Some of these songs celebrated bravery, military success, endurance and movement, while others carried deeply disillusioned emotional worlds shaped by homesickness, separation, loss and the brutality of war itself. This emotional duality became one of the defining characteristics of Hungarian traditional military folk culture. The hussar therefore survived within folk memory not merely as a victorious military figure, but also as a deeply human one shaped equally by suffering, longing, elegance, courage and endurance.

Songs such as the widely known "A jó lovas katonának"³⁷, through their later folklorization and enduring presence within Hungarian cultural memory, remain highly significant even today:

A jó lovas katonának de jól vagyon dolga,

Eszik-iszik a sátorban, semmire sincs gondja,

Hej élet, be gyöngy élet, ennél szebb sem lehet,

Csak az jöjjön katonának, aki ilyet szeret.

Paripáját megforgatja, úgy megyen dolgára,

Csillog-villog a mezőben virágszál módjára,

Hej élet, be gyöngy élet, ennél szebb sem lehet,

*Csak az jöjjön katonának, aki ilyet szeret.*³⁸

Translation:

The good cavalry soldier has such a fine life,

He eats and drinks in his tent, with not a care in sight.

Oh what a life, a pearl of a life — no fairer can there be,

Let only him become a soldier who loves it as does he.

He turns his steed around and rides out to his duty,

Glittering in the field like a blooming flower in beauty.

Oh what a life, a pearl of a life — no fairer can there be,

Let only him become a soldier who loves it as does he.

Generations of Hungarian children continue to encounter the figure of the hussar through school commemorations, songs, poems and other forms of cultural education from an early age. What such songs carried forward was not necessarily historical accuracy, but rather the atmosphere, mentality and symbolic image attached to hussar culture within popular memory.³⁹

Among numerous others, this song was a highly typical expression of notions of the time and still often sung by Hungarians holding a remembrance of the fighting, freedom or just because of its unique emotional atmosphere. As one could expect, it was not always as glorious as portrayed.

The battlefield was rough and life was often tough. It left the poor cavalymen often destitute and in need, wounded and starving. Yet, the romantic notion of the freedom fight was always well and alive, as it is still very much apparent in the Hungarian folk spirit surrounding the hussar.

Another well-known example from a later historical atmosphere presents a remarkably different emotional world. This popular hussar and military folk song centers not around the romanticized image of military life itself, but rather around demobilization, homecoming and maternal love. Its central emotional motif is not battlefield glory, but relief, return and the longing for home after years of absence.

Hosszú gőzös állott az állomásra

a kispéri huszároknak számára

a kispéri huszárok ülnek rája

mennek haza végleges szabadságra.

Nyisd ki anyám zöldre festett kapudat

ereszd be a szabadságos fiadat

nyitva van az kedves fiam vártalak

*három éve mióta nem láttalak.*⁴⁰

Translation:

⁴¹A long steam train stood at the station

For the hussars of Kispér.

The hussars of Kispér climbed upon it,

Going home on final leave.

Open, mother, your green-painted gate,

Let your son returning from service come inside.

It is open, my dear son, I waited for you,

Three long years since I last saw you.

The memories and songs of former soldiers, often our own great-grandfathers, frequently survived in this form within Hungarian folk culture. These songs accompanied nearly every stage of military life, from conscription and departure to campaigning, homesickness and eventual return. Their emotional tone often remained deeply restrained, melancholic and quietly cathartic rather than openly heroic. The song itself directly references Kispér, a settlement closely associated with horse breeding and cavalry culture. The appearance of the Kispéri hussar in military folk tradition illustrates how local cavalry communities became incorporated into the wider cultural memory of Hungarian hussardom.



Interestingly, the emotional world preserved within Hungarian military folk music often displays a striking contrast. Certain military songs preserve a lighter, rhythmically flowing and almost playful atmosphere centered around movement, freedom and the temporary escape from everyday hardship, while others preserve deeply melancholic layers shaped by mourning, absence, waiting and historical trauma.

It is important that different regional traditions often preserve these emotional worlds extremely differently as well. For example in Transylvania older and frequently more archaic forms of military folk culture preserved harsher, spiritually heavier and more tragic emotional tones, while within nineteenth-century Hungary itself the hussar increasingly became associated with the more romanticized and stylized atmosphere of verbunk culture and national military symbolism.

Yet throughout much of the Hungarian-speaking world of the Carpathian Basin, one reality remained remarkably persistent: what disappeared militarily, it survived culturally.

Horse Culture and Frontier Mentality

There is a certain mentality that emerges from such close existence with nature. They lived and worked together with their horses almost perpetually, therefore the connection between man and horse became unique not only emotionally, but also through mutual life and death reliance itself. In battle this mutual reliance possessed an even deeper significance, since cavalry warfare itself often depended upon momentum, cohesion and the fragile psychological trust between rider and horse. Once this trust collapsed through panic, exhaustion or confusion, even experienced cavalry formations could rapidly disintegrate.

Early modern perceptions often connected both animals and people to particular regions, landscapes and cultural worlds, while horses themselves were frequently associated with certain ethnic and geographical characteristics as well.⁴² In many ways the frontier world perceived human communities, animals and landscape itself far more organically interconnected than modern societies generally do today. This is why the horse is the center of the hussar's world, therefore the outcome of each battle significantly depended on the harmony between rider and animal.

The Hungarian military horse culture itself preserved remarkably old traditions for centuries. Certain horse breeds later associated strongly with Hungarian cavalry culture — such as Kisbér, Furioso–North Star, Gidrán and Lipizzaner connected to the wider Habsburg military sphere⁴³ — reflected not merely practical military breeding, but an entire historical world shaped by mobility, endurance and frontier warfare. In many ways these horses themselves became historical continuations of the older mounted culture from which the hussar originally emerged.

There were very rigorous guidelines regulating how one had to maintain equipment, care for horses and conduct everyday military life. This practical military environment made the cavalymen grounded, adaptive and quick in a deeply practical sense of the term. They were capable of surviving under harsh conditions and adapting rapidly to unstable situations. From such conditions emerged countless stories of small groups of hussars surviving or prevailing under seemingly hopeless circumstances. Mobility and rapid reaction therefore became not merely tactical advantages, but necessary conditions of survival itself. Hussars were frequently expected to scout terrain, disrupt enemy movement, pursue retreating forces or operate far ahead of larger formations under highly unstable battlefield conditions.⁴⁴

In later periods many hussars originated from relatively more prosperous rural and peasant backgrounds. Through their upbringing they often possessed an intuitive familiarity with animals, land and agricultural life itself, further contributing to the operational effectiveness of cavalry regiments.

Yet courage within the world of the hussar did not merely mean fearlessness in battle itself, but rather the ability to act quickly under unstable and often chaotic conditions. At first glance, the military role of the hussars may appear relatively obvious, yet few were truly capable of possessing the mentality required for this form of warfare.

Frontier cavalry warfare demanded rapid decision-making, initiative and the willingness to move under constant uncertainty. In many situations hesitation itself could become fatal. If ordered, the hussar had to ride and strike immediately. There was often no time for prolonged reflection once movement had already begun.

Hussars were expected to perform tasks that heavier formations often could not execute effectively: rapid flanking maneuvers, pursuit of retreating enemy forces and operations conducted far ahead of larger formations. Such missions regularly exposed small groups of cavalymen to isolation, exhaustion and considerable danger. The hussar therefore became essential precisely because he could operate effectively within instability itself. Under such conditions courage became inseparable from discipline, adaptability and trust between rider and horse. In many ways the hussar represented not simply bravery in the conventional sense, but a form of controlled aggressiveness shaped by movement, uncertainty and permanent readiness.

The growing international reputation of Hungarian hussar warfare eventually produced not only military imitation, but theoretical reflection as well. One particularly remarkable example was Mihály Lajos Jeney's military work published in The Hague in 1759 under the title *The Partisan, or the Art of Making War in Detachment* according to the *Genius of the Present Age*.⁴⁵

Often regarded as one of the earliest systematic theoretical works on light cavalry and partisan warfare written by a Hungarian hussar officer, the book reflected many of the tactical realities from which hussar warfare itself had originally emerged: mobility, reconnaissance, initiative, operational flexibility and decentralized action under unstable battlefield conditions. In many ways even Jeney's own life reflected the wider historical world of the hussar itself: frontier warfare, foreign military service, adaptation across empires and the transformation of practical battlefield experience into military theory.

The Hussar's Arms and Symbols

One must also mention the traditional weapons of the hussar, for these tools of war gradually became symbols as well. Among them, none became more closely associated with the image of the hussar than the saber, or *szablya* in Hungarian. Though hussars employed a variety of weapons throughout different historical periods, the curved saber eventually emerged as the defining image of the mounted Hungarian cavalrman.

Unlike the straight knightly swords of medieval Western Europe, the saber was designed primarily for mounted combat. Its curved blade allowed powerful cutting strikes to be delivered from horseback while maintaining speed and momentum. In Hungarian military memory the saber eventually became one of the most recognizable symbols of the hussar.

Another characteristic weapon was the *kopja*, the lance. During the sixteenth century it remained one of the primary offensive weapons of Hungarian cavalry.⁴⁶ Often measuring several meters in length, it was intended to deliver a devastating impact during the first moments of contact. Contemporary sources frequently mention large stores of replacement lances being carried alongside cavalry formations, since the weapon often broke upon impact and was regarded almost as a consumable instrument of war.

Alongside these weapons hussars also carried various secondary arms. Among them were pistols, which became increasingly widespread from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, as well as specialized thrusting weapons such as the *hegyestőr* or *koncerz*.⁴⁷ Certain cavalymen also carried heavier cutting weapons such as the *pallos*, preserving elements of older knightly military traditions within the evolving world of early modern warfare.

Particularly famous within Hungarian military memory was the notion of the *huszárvágás*, understood as the ideal of a swift and decisive saber strike delivered with precision, momentum and timing. The concept reflected an important aspect of hussar warfare itself: the preference for speed, initiative and effectiveness over prolonged engagement. As warfare continued to evolve, many of the older weapons gradually disappeared from regular hussar service.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the classic hussar was typically armed with a saber and one or more pistols, while the lance remained limited to certain cavalry formations and periods. This combination reflected the changing realities of cavalry warfare and became the weapon set most closely associated with the image of the hussar during the Napoleonic era and beyond.

Faith, Loyalty and Historical Mentality

It is of also very high importance to mention the faith hussars generally dearly held. This served as one of their most relentless and fierce weapons, granting them hope and will. We speak, of course, of the Christian faith. The hussars were either usually Catholic or Calvinist the two main denominations present in Hungary. There are accounts of prayer and references to God from the hussars' daily life. This was the case before battle and also before meals and lots of other smaller occasions.

The first and foremost loyalty was expected to be towards one's conscience and therefore towards God. Then entered the other forms of loyalty like nation and one's fellow soldiers, both also taken very seriously. It is important to note that in the mindset of the contemporary person of hussar times generally all of these loyalties were of equal importance and were interlinked.

The hussars conceived a concept of reality in which God and the faith had the same existence and aspects as material realities surrounding them. The world was not as or at all secularized as today, therefore, mentalities were also different naturally. This bound the soldier stronger than any other creed or steel chain. This was well apparent.

A hussar holds a relentless loyalty to their nation. Next to his faith, this was the defining factor of his allegiance. He was to serve God and Country and that is what he did till his last breath. Of course, this also included fighting alongside and for his comrades, fellow hussars. The loyalty of military brotherhood strongly bound all together in their service.

In this regard an iconic and truthful depiction is Sándor Sára's movie *the 80 huszár* or *80 Hussars* in English. The movie, released in 1978, portrays the undaunted spirit of the hussar. It is a work of depiction in terms of creating a story of a Hungarian hussar squadron disobeying Austrian orders and returning in 1848 from far off Polish lands.⁴⁸ Their journey is full of all types of peril but their spirit never wavers.

In essence being Hungarian meant for the longest time having a king, a ruler crowned by the Holy Crown of Hungary fulfilling all the necessary conditions of a valid coronation. This meant that the loyalty to the nation was manifest in the loyalty to the Holy Crown, since in Hungarian legal theory the Crown embodies the whole nation and its Constitutional sovereignty. Also, this meant being loyal to the properly crowned reigning king.⁴⁹ So the maxim may be completed with loyalty to God, Country and King. These three things are essential in understanding the hussar.

The Practical and Strategic Implications of Hussarism

The Watering of this Seed

Hussar culture does not only consist of the fighting styles and strategy it embodies. It is a spirit and a way of life. This guides the hussar in both daily tasks as well as in moments of fighting. There is lots of deep meaning and substance in the belief system. This, in turn, also means that the seed of such intense cultural depth can be awakened. This is not so dramatic since, there is still a great amount of historical consciousness and cultural memory across the sphere, just a matter of how and when this plethora of color can be invoked to assemble in real spirit serving as a groundwork for serious cross-boundary cooperation and communication.

An International Justification

Yet despite these international adaptations, as laid out in the previous section about international hussarism, the memory of the hussar often retained certain common characteristics: mobility, initiative, personal courage, loyalty to service and a distinctive martial ethos. These qualities are perhaps what make the hussar tradition particularly valuable even today.

The figure of the hussar reminds us of virtues that remain admirable far beyond the military sphere itself: Initiative in uncertain circumstances; Courage under pressure; Personal dignity and self-restraint; Loyalty to one's companions and the ability to make decisions under difficult conditions. These are qualities that may prove valuable for any individual regardless of profession or historical period.

We often speak about values, yet much less about the conditions through which such values are formed. Courage, discipline, reliability and responsibility rarely emerge from comfort yet more often are born from necessity, hardship and service. It demanded endurance, sacrifice and a willingness to accept uncertainty.

Yet it was precisely these conditions that shaped many of the qualities later admired in the hussar character.

For this reason, the hussar remains far more than a historical curiosity. Beneath the colorful uniforms, military victories and romantic imagery lies a deeper human experience. The hussar belonged to a world in which one's word still mattered, where loyalty was tested repeatedly, and where hesitation often carried real consequences. While modern life differs greatly from the realities of frontier warfare, the human qualities cultivated by such conditions have lost little of their relevance.

Yet perhaps the deepest significance of the hussar lies elsewhere. Every civilization preserves certain figures through which it remembers itself. Such figures survive not because of military victories alone, nor because of political usefulness, but because they embody something that later generations continue to recognize as meaningful. The hussar belongs to this category.

The modern world possesses many advantages, yet it often struggles to articulate what type of person it seeks to cultivate. We speak readily of rights, systems and institutions, but far less frequently of character. The hussar tradition offers no perfect model, nor should it be romanticized beyond recognition. Yet it does preserve a language through which courage, loyalty, service, responsibility and initiative may still be discussed in a concrete and recognizable form.

This is perhaps why the memory of the hussar continues to endure. Not because modern society requires cavalymen, but because it still requires many of the human qualities that once made cavalymen necessary. In this sense the hussar survives not only as a historical figure, but also as a symbol through which broader questions concerning culture, identity and civilization may be approached.



Three Hungarian Hussars, 1916 (fortepan.hu)

The road which the Hungarians must tread is to a large extent determined, yet there still remains room for self-deliberation and motivation. The hussar stands as a remarkable example of a life shaped by purpose rooted initiative and service, all the while remaining rooted in concrete national values. There are options here and the liberty to take them in finding points of connection along civilizational examples. Let us not be too hasty to dismiss them in their potential utility.

The 'Wonder' of the Hussar

The character of the allegorical Hussar may serve to redefine a great amount of our modern understanding of the world. This is solely due to its metaphysical presence and movement. The abstraction happening when a hussar is introduced through this paper is that its main immaterial features are placed in a non-physical realm. In which, there is a prompting to embody certain principles. This idea, of course, greatly deviates from much of the modern conception of geopolitics and diplomacy.

Yet, that is where its charm or, we could state, 'Wonder' lies. Wonder, in this context, is the idea of deepening human diplomatic communication with much deeper culturally expressed truths which are tying together the material and the immaterial. In no way is the term used in a religious manner, it is utilized as a philosophical term in a system of ideas. The abstraction of the hussar in all its form and appearance serves an image of enchantment, unlocking a plethora of great ideals shared by many cultures but specifically expressed by Hungarian cultural tradition and presented by the Hungarian light cavalry.

This whole idea serves to shift the window of discussion when talking of geopolitics from a very hands-on and grounded approach to a much more immaterial one. It can be seen as an attempt at combating raw realism. A sort of cry against the heavily interest based, today so commonly used, Machiavellian nature of diplomatic communication. A great attempt at the reinstating of the transcendently inspired by a manner of commonly recognized code.

The combination of the hussar's mythical features stand as a manner of drawing in all parties to a common based in reality but idealized element. This then is implementing a new view of behavior and ideas. Of course, this leaves the whole discussion of to what extent does reality creep back out open, but it is of crucial importance to perceive this as a type of guiding principle.

It is of vital note that the 18th century hussar's principles in fighting are Christian and European in their origins. They majorly transformed from their older nomadic characteristics to settled converted ones, thus evolving with age.⁵⁰ The deriving of these mechanisms stem from a long tradition of European history. The attributes were forged by fights for autonomy both in and by faith by the nation called the 'Shield of Christianity' or the Kingdom of Hungary.

Therefore, the principles nowadays embodied in the hussar ethos are Christian, the Hungarian pagan elements have been 'baptized' or Christianized. This sort of imagination, with our commonly shared values and history as presented by the hussars in their developments in later centuries, may be regarded as a cure. The spirit of being a shield of Christianity may be invoked in a highly strong manner here. A cure for our present state of Western internal divisional strife and animosity.

The lack of Christian belief due to the increasing secularization has destroyed much of the concept of what built our very civilization. This lack could not be more visible with the current divides. One way of possibly reinvigorating this is by approaching it from a different angle entirely. One which, for its aims, does not necessarily require the direct common system of institutional faith at the moment. We cannot utilize what we do not possess.

This common culturally expressed history which lifts up, by nature to the higher ideals, could stir away from enlightened realism by shining through it Christian ideals. It would serve as a tool, or a type of glue, and reinvigorate that power which built our common civilization upon objective pillars of truth we still hold culturally. These aspects would hopefully give us a sharpness to cut back against the weight of the clumsy nihilism which has taken root. The Hussar Strategy is a specific proposition for a diplomatic geopolitical antidote.

Outlets for Potential Diplomatic Soft Power Exercises

It is important to consider the actual practical side of all of this mutual connection and knowledge. There is an immense arsenal which opened up potential cooperation given the explored cultural connection. It may very well be argued that the amount of connection is higher than it at first appears.

It appears to be that there are seeds of common ground scattered in hussar culture. They appear small on a map but one may think of them as wells, they are incredibly deep. This is because of the amount of shared cultural and historical aspects which transcend mere space and time, creating depth. This is the firmament to build up on a good foundation.

One aspect is the physical actualization of the cooperation that may be done. This has many facets of directions in which the cooperation can head. One of those is cultural, historically revivalist, events. These may very well range from just a cultural event together to a whole entire reenactment of battles of the past. These may be likened to the ones such as Projekt Austerlitz and many other less known smaller in scale across Hungary.⁵¹ Both may be a base for grassroots cooperation between different nations and Hungary. This may be also performed on an official level as well. Hungary already has Hussars in the castle district who ride, wearing their colorful uniforms. Visitors and even official delegations often see these soldiers along with the ceremonial guards evoking seriousness in them. Embodying a direct line of tradition from the already mentioned 1760 guards established for this purpose by Maria Theresa.

In a similar fashion another arrangement could be performed on the highest level. That the common historical roots of the cavalry could be celebrated around the hemisphere, even in the highest of political offices. This could open serious levels of cooperation from which other points, more imminent, may be discussed. Hussar diplomacy can be viewed as a gateway to higher levels but a gate where both partners already possess the key. There is no suggestion here of going to great levels on this alone, since it is a small aspect in the vision. This is just an attempt at utilizing something common and unique.

The exact manner in which these diplomatic ties are to be achieved and cultivated are still to be reckoned. Lots depends on what the given governments and others such as the hussars think of the approaches and ideas detailed here. It is by no means a demeaning or a tool-like utilization of their heritage, lifestyle and culture. The opposite, it is meant to be seen as something noble and honorable and this is an attempt to give it the space it deserves. Therefore, it is of profound curiosity what the hussar community thinks of such a proposal of ideas and if they would be willing to participate in some manner.

Active versus Passive Role

Above all, it is important to note that this essay is not primarily about hard diplomacy but soft-power and diplomacy. Also, it does not touch on diplomatic protocol. In this concept the hussar spirit could shine through in a new way possibly, even though diplomacy holds many of these aspects already.

It is a question whether the hussar should take an active or a passive role in this form of diplomatic transformational vision. It would have to be assumed that there is a difference between the two roles. That if the hussar does not perform something materially then he is not active. That is almost as if, the idea of the spirituality of the hussar which animates the soul and brings to action is not enough to count as active. Thus, in this regard, it may be said that there is no difference. The sheer thought of hussar mentality which may influence one or cause them to take action is already active.

Yet, in practical terms this would appear in the form of certain acts performed. Some of these would include the embodiment of the character by demonstrating a much more bold and swift style of diplomacy, especially towards non-friendly nations. This may be likened to the swift strikes of the hussar cavalry when swooping in for battle, in order to break the enemy combatant's formation.⁵²

This aspect demonstrates a key feature of hussarism and strategy and has proven to be effective for centuries. The question remains what this quick swooping would appear as in modern day diplomacy and negotiation. This is just a metaphor, for tactics never involving violence. The matter remains that there often must be an element of Hungarian cunning or 'furfang' embedded in the action -ince that is what the hussar cultivated and adapted and its inner spirit reflects.

Another aspect of the expression of hussar mannerism is the closeness to the land. This may serve as an example in the diplomatic conception of hussarism as a manner to always remember those cultivating and managing the land when dealing with negotiations between nations. In this sense the locals, in terms of farmers and small businesses, have to be considered given their large contribution to the ecosystem both naturally and in economic support.

The ecosystem is heavily being impacted with water shortages and different climate catastrophes. This sort of diplomacy would create unity and dismantle possible climate caused tension points, making it particularly relevant at the time of writing.

The following proposition revolves around cultivation of diversity. It follows the all too commonly heard, 'to each their own' concept by a more specified hussarist approach. It flows from the well-addressed concept of Hadik in his writing about each nationality of troop preferring a different fighting style. This may be an exceptionally important point to consider when relating the fighting to today's diplomatic landscape. Since, in this case it is detailed how it is best case scenario if each nation follows their own attitude and for common strategic gain. This can create more unity and provide an approach for relations and is a considerable good use of soft power. By this notion diversity could be a strength.

Finally, let us consider the fighting spirit. The hussar has a tremendous fighting spirit filled with all types of innovative techniques. A common diplomacy could mirror this type of swiftness. A cunning pathfinding innovation coupled with an immense ability to maneuver quickly towards a goal, all in a peaceful way, while utilizing soft-power practices such as cultural diplomacy.

The idea of this section is to lay out a type of diplomacy which is specifically based on concrete ways of thinking in terms of a code. We speak of a warrior code based on some of the Hungarian hussar's beliefs and mannerisms. It is similar to the Middle-Ages idea of chivalry or the samurai code, and other different ways of thinking and acting around the world based on a code of historically developed beliefs. In this sense it is the implanting of the hussar's ancient and long developed mentality into a modern context. This is a difficult section to develop in significant detail since this notion of implementation is something new and dynamic. Many may implement it in their own way or gain conception from the hussar's life and character to different extents. Ultimately, it is a source to draw inspiration from and for each to implement as seen fit.

These above are all ways in which Hussarism could have its leading more abstract mannerism and codes transformed into actions of peaceful diplomacy and negotiation. It is still to be exactly experimented how these proposals are received and implemented at large, at any rate there is a lot of space for diversity.

Conclusion

When one looks upon hussar culture, they can observe the hussar's character and widespread effects of such. It is clear that this is no mere common culture. There is a significant development of arms, attitude and a historical root associated with being a hussar. As one observes the great evolution of both the hussar's weapon and fighting strategy a highly intricate picture unfolds, composed by many layers of tradition. The mosaic created is stunning in effect.

All the way from the Hungarian steppe origins of the hussar to the Napoleonic wars, it is no exaggeration to say that these soldiers and this culture is profound. From the writings of Jeney and Hadik to the Bercsényi hussars in France or the regiments fighting in World War I, there is a plethora of color and military strategy among the different times.

This is why the initiative of proposing a common strategy for diplomacy is interesting and relevant. There is simply a wide enough reaching foundation to build on meanwhile honoring the memory and tradition of the hussar.

The history portrays that the hussar has gone through many transformations both in fighting style and wear. Meanwhile, the spirit of this cavalymen stayed fixed or even developed under the harsh grind of time. The character traits required in the profession fused and were highlighted significantly, this elevation is evident. Many of its developments may be good strategically related to diplomacy if translated in the proper manner. While many of the hussar's characteristics could be seen as a great way to unite Western nations under one banner of common identity for a more value based culture.

All in all there is a good reason to take up the memory and culture of such a grand tradition which is fully in origin Hungarian and honor it by providing it as a common platform. This platform may reach across borders and hold up all types of communication and interests for the Hungarian nation. While also possibly benefiting others in cultivating relations and providing an inspiring example for a newer way of thinking. This example could provide a feasible and righteous manner to secure a better Hungarian future, while respecting and remembering those who served in the uniform of the hussar. All in the spirit of Country, faith and service.



Hungarian Hussars pictured on horseback, 1939 (fortepan.hu)

Endnotes

¹Szűcs Gergely, *The Hussar*, 2026

²Some sources identify one of the earliest known references connected to the term during the reign of Louis I of Hungary (r. 1342–1382). In a royal document dated 30 November 1378, certain armed groups were referred to as “hunzar.” See: *Takáts Sándor: Emlékezzünk eleinkről*, Budapest, 1910, p. 85.; Magyar Országos Levéltár, Diplomatikai Levéltár (DL) 35.887., Visegrád, 30 November 1378

³Berkó István: *A magyar huszárság története* (Budapest, 1931), pp. 9., 11-12. [A magyar huszárság története](#)

⁴Zsuffa Sándor: *A huszár szó és a magyar huszárság eredete* (Budapest, 1935), pp. 15., 17-18., 21–24. [A huszár szó és a magyar huszárság eredete](#)

⁵B. Szabó János: A honfoglalóktól a huszárokig. A középkori magyar könnyűlovasságról - A Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum Könyvtára (Budapest, 2010), pp. 173

⁶Berkó István: *A magyar huszárság története* (Budapest, 1931), pp. 25–28., 31-32. https://mtda.hu/books/berko_istvan_a_magyar_huszarsag_tortenete.pdf

⁷B. Szabó János: A honfoglalóktól a huszárokig. A középkori magyar könnyűlovasságról - A Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum Könyvtára (Budapest, 2010), pp. 74-105.

⁸Réfi Attila: *A magyar huszárság fejlődése és szerepe a kora újkor hadviselésében* (doktori tézis), ELTE BTK, (Budapest, 2008) pp. 12–19.

⁹Réfi Attila: *Doktori tézisek – A császári-királyi huszárság társadalomtörténete*, pp. 5–11. <https://doktori.btk.elte.hu/hist/refi/tezis.pdf>

¹⁰Géza Pálffy: *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century*, Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, (Boulder, 2009), pp. 8-9.

¹¹Czigány István: „Aszimmetrikus” háborúk a kora újkorban. *Kuruc felkelések Magyarországon (1672–1711)*, in: *Horn Ildikó et al. (szerk.), Művészet és mesterség. Tisztelgő kötet R. Várkonyi Ágnes emlékére, II. kötet* (Budapest, 2016) pp. 498-499.

¹²Beyond its military significance, the *kuruc* gradually evolved into one of the central symbols of Hungarian national resistance and collective memory. Kuruc soldier songs, exile songs (*bujdosó énekek*) and the rich tradition of *kuruc* poetry preserved the image of the freedom fighter long after the uprisings themselves had ended. During the nineteenth century, the *kuruc* legacy was further elevated through the works of Kálmán Thaly, the romantic historical novels of Mór Jókai, and the historical imagination of Mihály Vörösmarty, although figures such as Ferenc Kölcsey often approached the phenomenon with greater critical distance. The *kuruc* world also became a recurring theme in Hungarian historical painting, including works associated with Mihály Munkácsy and Gyula Benczúr, while the *Rákóczi March* emerged as one of the most enduring musical symbols of Hungarian national resistance.

¹³Czigány 2016, pp. 488–490.

¹⁴Tóth Ferenc: *Vivat hussar! - 300 éves a franciaországi Bercsényi-huszárezred*. ELTE, Humán Tudományok Kutatóközpontja, 2020. május 16. Online: <https://www.abtk.hu/ismerettar/blog/vivat-hussar-300-eves-a-franciaorszagi-bercsenyi-huszarezred>

¹⁵André Jouineau – Jean-Marie Mongin: *Officers and Soldiers of the French Hussars 1786–1804: From the Ancien Régime to the Empire, Histoire & Collections*, (Paris, 2004) pp. 20., 24.

¹⁶David Hollins – Darko Pavlovic: *Hungarian Hussar 1756–1815* (Oxford, 2003) pp. 15–24.

¹⁷Hadik, András: *Hadik András válogatott hadügyi írásai*, ed. Gábor Hausner, Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó, (Budapest, 2021), p. 163.

¹⁸Ibid. pp.161-162.

¹⁹Ibid. pp. 13, 177-178.

²⁰Ibid. p.13.

²¹Ibid. pp. 171-172.

²²Bukhari, Emir: *Napoleon's Hussars*, Osprey Publishing, (London, 1978), p. 3.

²³Réfi Attila: *A császári-királyi huszárság törzstiszti kara a francia forradalmi és a napóleoni háborúk korában (1792–1815)*. (Budapest–Sárvár, 2014) pp. 63-70.

²⁴Hollins–Pavlović 2004, pp. 3-7, 15-24; Jouineau–Mongin 2004, pp. 6-8, 20-24.

²⁵Brzezinski, Richard – Vuksic, Velimir: *Polish Winged Hussar 1576–1775*, Osprey Publishing, (Oxford, 2006), pp. 6–9.

²⁶Réfi Attila: *A császári-királyi huszárság törzstiszti kara a francia forradalmi és a napóleoni háborúk korában (1792–1815)*. (Budapest–Sárvár, 2014) pp. 91, 95

²⁷Tóth, Ferenc: *1720: Bercsényi László huszárezredet alapít Franciaországban*. In: *Magyarország globális története : A kezdetektől 1868-ig*. (Budapest, 2023) pp. 339-343

²⁸Wellington's Light Cavalry. Men-at-Arms Series 126, Fosten Bryan, p. 3

²⁹Honfi, József (1968): *A huszárság kialakulása a XVIII. századi orosz hadseregben*. Hadtörténeti Közlemények, 15 (1), pp. 98-102.

³⁰Pintér, Zoltán Árpád: *Fabriczy Kováts Mihály* (Budapest, 2021)

³¹Ádám, Barnabás: *A 21. századi huszárság feladatai a honvédelemben*. Doktori (PhD) értekezés, Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem (Budapest, 2024) pp. 101-102.

³²*Austro-Hungarian Armies of World War I*, Osprey Publishing, Men-at-War 68, pp. 8–9, 12–16.

³³*Austro-Hungarian Armies of World War I*, pp. 16–17.

³⁴Topor, István (2015): *A magyar királyi debreceni 2. honvéd huszárezred első világháborús harcainak emlékezete*, Honvédségi Szemle, 143 (1), pp. 140–145.; Rózsafi, János: *Lóról szállt huszárok, mint gyalogos utóvéd harcai Cirokaófalunál*. Nagy Háború Blog, 2021. december 3. Online: https://nagyhaboru.blog.hu/2021/12/03/lorol_szallt_huszarok_mint_gyalogos_utoved_harcai_cirokaofalunal

³⁵Szabó, Péter: *Keleti front, nyugati fogság. A Magyar Honvédség a második világháborúban és azután 1941-1946*. Jaffa Kiadó (Budapest, 2018).

³⁶Dr. Mujzer, Péter (2018): *Az 1. lovas-, a későbbi huszárhadosztály páncélosalakulatai a keleti fronton, 1944-ben*. Haditechnika, LII.(3), pp. 2–4.

³⁷[Amade László – idézetek – Kulturális Enciklopédia](#)

³⁸A jó lovas katonának, lyrics, <https://www.zeneszoveg.hu/dalszoveg/26915/katonadalok/a-jo-lovas-katonanak-zeneszoveg.html>

³⁹Barnabás Ádám and Bálint Csögér, “A huszárság lehetséges feladatai a hazafias és honvédelmi nevelésben,” *Hadtudományi Szemle* 16, no. 2 (2023), pp. 125

⁴⁰A widely known Hungarian military folk song preserved in several regional variants. Institute for Musicology, HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities: “*Hosszú gőzös állott az állomásra*”, Folk Music Collection (Hungaricana Digital Archive), accessed 8 June 2026, [Hosszú gőzös állott az állomásba | Folk Music | Hungaricana](#)

⁴¹Translation by the authors

⁴²Béres Sándor: *Négy lábú seregek. A lovasság hadászati szerepe*, Rubicon, 2020/1

⁴³Bodó Imre – Hecker Walter: *Magyar lófajták*, Mezőgazda Kiadó, (Budapest, 2004).

⁴⁴Mihály Lajos Jeney: *The Partisan, or the Art of Making War in Detachment according to the Genius of the Present Age*, (The Hague, 1759).

⁴⁵Mihály Lajos Jeney: *The Partisan, or the Art of Making War in Detachment according to the Genius of the Present Age*, originally published in The Hague, 1759; Hungarian edition, Magvető Könyvkiadó, (Budapest, 1986).

⁴⁶Béres Sándor: *Négy lábú seregek. A lovasság hadászati szerepe*, Rubicon, 2020/1.

⁴⁷Béres Sándor: *Négy lábú seregek. A lovasság hadászati szerepe*, Rubicon, 2020/1.

⁴⁸Sára Sándor, 80 huszár, 1978.

⁴⁹ardos József: *A Szent Korona-tan és a legitimizmus* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2012), 53–55.

⁵⁰Bárány Attila: *Wars, Warfare, and Military Organization*, in: Florin Curta et al. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Central Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022.

⁵¹Projekt Austerlitz, <https://www.austerlitz.org/en/>

⁵²Réfi Attila: *A magyar huszárság fejlődése és szerepe a kora újkor hadviselésében* (doktori tézis), ELTE BTK, (Budapest, 2008) pp. 12–19.

