

REMINISCENCES OF AN IMMIGRANT

RECOUNTED BY CHARLES BARTHA
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GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

G E R M A N

ch	guttural <u>h</u>	ei	<u>i</u> ce
eu	<u>l</u> awyer	ie	<u>f</u> ee <u>t</u>
ö	French <u>f</u> eu	tz, z	<u>i</u> ts
sch	<u>s</u> he	ü	French <u>u</u>
v	<u>f</u> ather	w	<u>v</u> ery

H U N G A R I A N

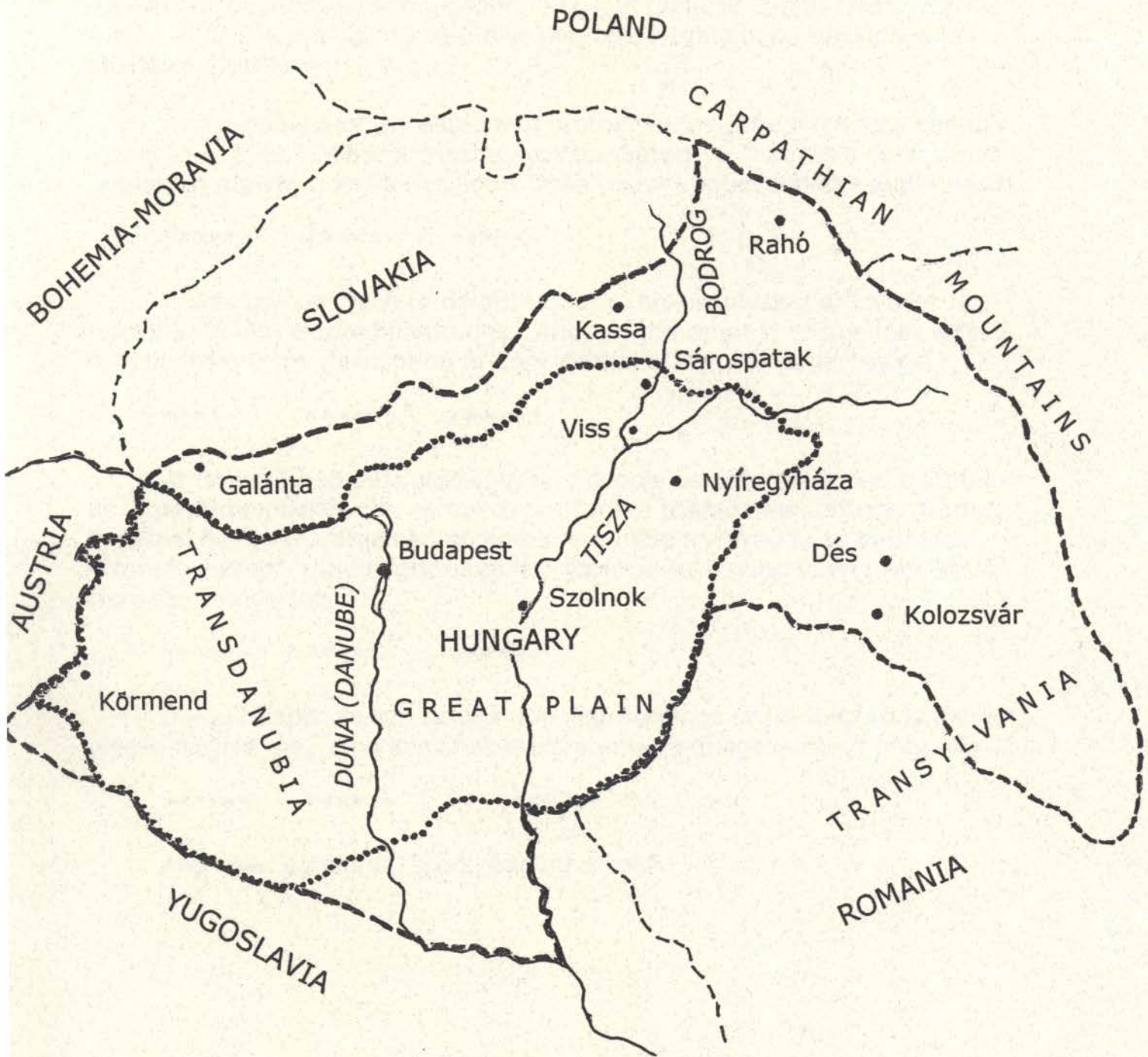
a	<u>l</u> aw	á	<u>f</u> ather
c	<u>i</u> ts	é	<u>a</u> te
g	<u>g</u> o (always)	j, ly	<u>y</u> es
ny	cogn <u>a</u> c	s	<u>s</u> he
sz	<u>s</u> ee	ó	<u>s</u> h <u>o</u> w
ö, ő	French <u>f</u> eu	ü	French <u>u</u>
zs	meas <u>u</u> re	gy	"mad <u>y</u> ear"

R O M A N I A N




c(e)	<u>ch</u> ow	j	meas <u>u</u> re
ş	<u>s</u> he	u	<u>t</u> ru <u>e</u>

S L O V A K

c	<u>i</u> ts	š	<u>s</u> he
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Legend:

-  Current borders
-  Borders in the 1940s
-  National boundaries

Dear reader of the accounts of my life, do not expect to find extra-events or happenings in this paper. Yet, the Chinese curse: "May you live in a memorable era" is applicable to me, too, having lived through a few interesting years.

In the opinion of my esteemed brother-in-law, the twentieth century was a "bad joke." What a truism; yet the adjective "bad" is a cynical misnomer, in my view, while the noun "joke" is an unquestionable euphemism.

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It was my intention to do little, if any, philosophizing or to bore the reader with overworked platitudes. And, on the request of my dear wife, I refrained from the description of gory details of my war experiences.

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At times, I had difficulties quoting people as accurately and truthfully as I can remember in the perspective of more than half a century. Some phrases, however, remained etched in my memory exactly as they were uttered. Except, they might have lost their savor having been translated from the Hungarian.

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If you happen to run across unusual wordings or un-English idioms, please forgive me. One does not learn a new language without impunity.

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And now, go ahead, start reading a spell.

Viss, my native village, is situated at the congruence of rivers Tisza and Bodrog in Northeastern Hungary.

My maternal grandfather, for decades the village mayor, was a relatively well-off "amerikás," a fellow who completed a stint in America. He worked hard and returned with his saved money. His only son, however, remained in Pennsylvania.

My father was a "Székely," member of a large ethnic group in the easternmost part of Transylvania. These proud people claim to be descendants of the Huns, and speak an archaic version of Hungarian.

My father was captured in WWI and spent seven years in Russian POW camps in Siberia. Somehow, he managed to escape in Vladivostok to Japan, from there to the USA. He even took a train ride from the West Coast to New York. How he crossed two oceans and a continent with no money to his credit, still remains a mystery to me.

When my father returned to Transylvania, it was already part of Romania, according to the Versailles Peace Treaty. He could have remained there to teach, provided he sign an oath of allegiance to the Romanian State. Refusing to sign it, he was unceremoniously deported to Hungary.

Eventually, he found a teaching position in Viss. He also played the organ for the small Reformed Congregation there.

Being single, my father ate his meals at the home of my mother's parents. They fell in love and got married.

I happened to be their first child, born on Oct. 23, in the year 1923. Thereafter, in rapid succession, four of my brothers were born in Viss. My youngest brother arrived in Kolozsvár, at the time I wore the uniform of the 26th Infantry Regiment of the Hungarian Army.

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Now you believe me when I jokingly state that I was born at grape harvest time. Except that we had no vineyard, only an orchard.

What can you do, as a child, in a village with no electricity, no indoor plumbing, unpaved streets, and only a narrow-gauge railway leading into distant civilization. The dirt road to the next hamlet became a quagmire, thus unpassable, during the spring and fall rainy seasons.

Despite of these, we never had a dull moment. We built our own toys, roamed the orchards, and fished practically every day.

Water remained in shallow ponds from the spring flood. Making the water muddy by dragging our feet in the muck, we grabbed the fish as they came up to the surface to breath. During early winter, we looked for pikes under the thin ice. Hitting them on the head with the blunt end of an ax and cutting a hole in the ice, we retrieved our stunned prize. One can catch fish several ways with a little ingenuity.

Because our father was the schoolmaster, we behaved well in the one-room school building. Although we had no homework, we liked the summer vacation better which seemed to last forever.

After having finished the fifth grade, my parents took me to the nearest city, Sárospatak, and enrolled me in the 450 year old high school administered by the Reformed Church.

I cried only a little when the train pulled out with my parents. Luckily, I knew a classmate with whom I shared a room, along with two older students.

Returning from the depot, we headed to the school garden: a forest with twisting roads full with sculptures of famous former professors. We played Indians and soon forgot about being away from home for the first time.

The curriculum was rather demanding at the "gimnázium," the name of an eight-year high school in Hungarian.

We started to study Latin from the first day on, every day for eight years. The German language followed, only three times a week, starting in the second grade.

Other subjects differed by grade, but usually consisted of mathematics, geometry, history, literature and religion, physics and chemistry having been taught at the higher grades.

Fortunately, there were a few subjects for which we didn't have to prepare, such as physical education, singing lessons, and drawing.

The daily routine at the boarding school was the following:

6 AM reveille and clean-up	6:30 breakfast
7-7:30 mandatory study period, called "silencium" (i.e. silence)	
8-1 50 min. lectures followed by 10 min. breaks	
1 PM lunch and free time	4-6 study period
6 PM supper and free time	7-8 study period
8-9 preparation for bedtime	9 PM lights out.

Students living at home were required to study during the afternoon and evening "silencium." This was enforced by sporadic inspections by the home room teachers.

Each room in the dormitory had an older pupil, usually a seminary student, who acted as an overseer.

The food at the mess hall was simple but adequate. Being always hungry, we ate everything.

We could go home for the three religious holidays only and for the summer recess. Relatives could visit us during the weekends, bringing us fresh clothing and food-stuff that we shared with the members of the room.

Being good (two of my brothers: excellent) students, we received a nice amount of stipend. Our parents paid only a nominal fee for our education.

In the fifth grade in high school, we could choose between two new languages: English or ancient Greek. Because my parents wanted me to have a classical education (for which I'm forever grateful), they recommended that I study the Greek language. How well I could have used a few idioms in English in the near distant future, and again, when I emigrated to the USA.

In 1938, we could travel once more to Kassa (Košice in Slovak), due to the first Vienna agreement.

In September of 1939, we watched and cheered the remnants of the Polish forces, as they marched through the city. These soldiers, about 200 thousands of them, were allowed to stay in the Transdanubian part of Hungary. They kept their uniforms and insignia, being protected from the Germans by our military.

Later on in Budapest, if one saw a sign in a shop window: "Ici on parle française," that speaker usually was a French soldier who escaped from the Germans and found asylum in Hungary.

By the second award in Vienna in 1940, that part of Transylvania where Hungarians were in majority was adjudged to return to Hungary.

My father's joy was immense. He immediately applied for a teaching position. He got one in Kolozsvár, capital of Transylvania.

At mid-term in the seventh (junior) grade, my father decided to move there, not waiting for the summer vacation.

Kolozsvár, known by the adjective "treasure full" in Hungarian, is called by several names: Cluj by the Romanians, Klausenburg by the German speakers, and Napoca by the invading Romans almost two thousand years ago.

When we arrived there, majority of her citizens were of Hungarian stock. They were delighted to be back in the arms of the mother country after twenty years of Romanian rule. We were also glad to meet our first cousins for the first time.

To my father's surprise, he was promoted to be the principal of an elementary school. When he introduced himself, he recognized the former principal as his POW buddy in Siberia. After they embraced, my father abdicated on the spot to the favor of his long-seen friend.

My classmates received me amicably. Because I spoke no Romanian, I had plenty of time to prepare for the next sessions during that class. So was with the French language. My Latin teacher gave me some homework occasionally from the Greek textbook I brought with me.

When I met my German instructor for the first time, I told him that we didn't learn much because my former professor was an avid Germanophobe. His face didn't show much emotion. I learned later that the student sitting behind me was a Saxon (an ethnic German living in Transylvania, with whom I later became good friends), and that the teacher was formerly Jewish, turned Calvinist.

He never called me up for recital afterwards. Apparently, he liked me for what I've said about the Germans. In fact, much later, on the day of my Hungarian literature oral examination, Dr. Brühl awaited me at the door of the high school. He asked me about my dream last night. Jokingly, I told him that I received the thesis about the narrative poems of our most famous lyrical poet, Petőfi.

Was it a coincidence or the machination of my professor, I cannot tell, that the strip of paper we had to pull randomly from an urn, contained the thesis: the exact wording of my "dream."

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Let the next little anecdote illuminate his way of communicating with his mischievous pupils.

We started and ended the school day by singing a hymn and saying a short prayer.

During our last year, we happened to have the same teacher, Dr. Emmanuel Brühl, for the first as well as for the last session on Tuesdays.

For the morning hymn, we chose the longest one in our repertoire: Psalm CXXXVII. We wailed not unlike the Jews during their captivity in Babylon. We sang it miserably slow as if being in a funeral procession. We did everything to delay of being called up for recital.

Professor Brühl seemed to take this bravely first, only his eyes rolled occasionally. He studied the cracks in the ceiling in detail. He swayed back and forth trying to hasten the tempo.

For the closing hymn, we favored one with a lively tune, consisting of only two lines. This we sang joyously with enthusiasm, books under arms, ready to burst through the door to go home.

On the third Tuesday, papa Brühl, as we called him among us, took out his hymnal from his left pocket, and started to sing with us. His white mane flying, his head shaking, his voice trembling now and then, he kept on singing--all twelve verses of it.

We got his subtle yet canny message.

Just before our graduation, word got around that all able bodied will be inducted into the army. Then, after receiving basic training, they will be sent to the Russian front.

Before taking the strenuous final examinations, I visited a lady fortune teller--in her trance to be called Brother Joseph--for advice. For a silver coin, she (or he) predicted that I'll pass my exams, and in due time, I shall become a high ranking officer. But before that, I'll emigrate to the USA.

Heeding her (or his) advice, I didn't put too much effort to study, yet I received passing grades.

After my father advised me to apply for admission to the Royal Military Academy in Budapest, I complied. On his recommendation, I selected the Gendarme branch of the military, a noncombatant armed police force. According to my dad, the war should be over in four years. Receiving free education, I might even acquire a degree in criminal law.

He was partially right. The war was over in four years, but it was still raging on when I got my premature commission, and I never received a degree in law.

Successfully taking a battery of tests, which lasted for two days, I was accepted as a cadet of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie. But first, plebes were required to serve for a year as regular conscripts.

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After the war, the Academy and the Gendarmerie were abolished by the Communist regime.

The basic training with the 26th Infantry Regiment in Dés, fifty miles away where we lived, was not a boys scout affair. Up at six, we drilled all day long. The food was bad and not nearly enough.

After eight weeks of training, those of us with high school diplomas had to attend the Noncommissioned Officers (NCO) course.

During a field exercise, I was assigned to carry a light machine gun (LMG), twice as heavy as a regular rifle, with its huge spare parts carrying case. When I jumped with it from a cliff, I chipped one of my metatarsal bones. Despite the pain, I still had to crawl 220 yards in the deep snow with the LMG.

Marching back to the barracks for lunch, we had to sing through the city. My leg hurting more and more, my strength started to wane. I began to see stars. My right-hand buddy noticing that my face turned white, gave me a slug of water to drink.

In the parade ground during the exercise evaluation, I barely could stand. The commanding officer, accused of being a sadist, who until now rode his horse ahead of us, finally noticed that I was swaying. He gave me an order to step out of the ranks. With my remaining strength, I refused his order. On his repeated command, I collapsed.

I still don't know how I got to my bed. Shaking all over my body, I woke up for the evening meal: the usual dried cabbage soup with a sliver of sinewy meat and a slice of bread.

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Later, when I returned from the hospital, I became one of the Captain's favorite students.

Early next day, on a gloomy, foggy Saturday, the regimental march was held with full gear. There was no sick call that morning.

Each step hurting, I dragged on. Luckily, we only covered 40 km (approx. 25 miles).

Toward evening, a horse drawn ammunition carriage passed by me. Instinctively, I grabbed a part of it, until a corporal sitting on the back hit my left wrist with his bayonet in its sheath. Now I felt another deep pain that did not appear to subside.

Monday morning, I finally had a chance to go to the infirmary. Stupidly enough, I just complained about my swollen, black and blue right leg. The doctor sent me immediately to the garrison hospital in Kolozsvár, where I looked up my parents first for a few hours.

At the hospital, the X-ray clearly showed the fracture. Because I was accepted to the Military Academy, I was assigned to the officers' quarters. The food was superb. I spent the most enjoyable four weeks of my military service there.

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For ten additional months, I did all rifle exercises with my broken wrist. No wonder my classmates called me: the fakir (an ascetic person who can tolerate pain well).

During late summer of 1943, as pre-plebes, we participated with the upperclassmen at the Academy's grand exercise. This was held in a forsaken part of the Hungarian Great Plain, on a sandy desert terrain.

Marching through some wretched vineyards at the conclusion of the war games, we bought unwashed, questionable quality grapes by the helmetful from the harvesters. How heavenly it tasted because we were not only hungry, but exceedingly thirsty.

About half an hour later, many of the cadets, including me, had to stop, run off the road into the thicket, and go through the following torturous routine:

Throw down the rifle,
Remove the gasmask carrying case,
Take off the belt with the bayonet on it,
Remove the back pack loaded with the overcoat, a flap of tent,
and the blanket hanging on its bottom part,
Remove the bread sack adorned with the infantry spade and,
finally,
Take off the pants, etc., in a hurry.

Thereafter, put back everything in reverse order and try to catch-up with the company in double time.

By the time we did this manipulation two or three times, one cannot forget such an experience for a long time.

We finally exchanged our infantry uniforms to that of the cadets. Instructions started in earnest.

Our lecturers were mostly Austro-Hungarian colonels, extremely pedant yet boring. The younger officers, many of them wounded on the Russian front, were lively instructors: interesting but quite conceited. (One of them, for example, started his first lecture this way: "I, Rommel, and the other famous tank warfare tacticians...") A major from the Gendarmerie tried to introduce us to the labyrinth of criminal law.

There were several field trips interspersed with the classroom lectures. One of the most memorable was the month long winter exercise above Rahó in the eastern Carpathian Mountains.

For an arduous week, we underwent partisan training outdoors. We skied a lot and slept in caverns dug from a round central hole in the deep snow of a tall man's height.

The temperature dipped to -30 degrees at nights, but was not much warmer during the day hours. We were fed with a lukewarm meal once a day. If one didn't eat fast enough, his food froze to the aluminum mess gear.

It is a wonder we did not suffer serious frostbites during that frigid maneuver, full with shivering and chattering of teeth.

The classroom instructions came to an abrupt end in March of '44. Due to the frequent bombardments: methodical and predictable by the Western Powers, haphazard and indiscriminate by the Russians, the faculties of the Academy were dispersed to the proximate countryside of Budapest.

Needing new officers on the Eastern Front, the class above us graduated a year ahead of schedule. We, in the lower grades, were ordered to help with the fortification on the Tisza river around Szolnok, an important railroad junction.

The Tisza, second largest river in Hungary, offered a natural barrier to the unstoppable advance of the Russians, helped by Romanian troops.

Hundreds of farmhands from near and far were employed to build a series of fortification on the west side of the river.

Toward the end of September, there were rumors that the Anglo-Saxon forces might make a beachhead on the Balkan Peninsula. We would have put down our weapons immediately. Unfortunately, this never happened. Knowing very well that we were on the losing side, our government's obsessive revulsion and excessive fear of Communism prevented them from switching sides as the Romanians did a few month ago.

The discipline in the military ebbed. Our officers disappeared, one by one, with heart and stomach problems. We, the cadets, took over the command.

One day, a laborer approached me. He was an ethnic Romanian from the vicinity of Kolozsvár, under Russian control already. He asked for a pass to visit his sick wife and children.

When I handed him the document, I whispered to him: "Don't come back." Grinning, he asked for my parents' address.

A good month later, this poor farmer knocked on the door of my parents, and presented them with a live hen and a dozen of eggs, a veritable treasure in those famine stricken times. Expressing his gratitude, he assured them that I was doing fine. Then he disappeared.

He was the only one from whom my parents heard of me till the end of the war.

The bunkers and elaborate trenches we built were never occupied or used by the Axis forces. The Russians succeeded to cross the Tisza well above us. We were ordered to dismiss the labor force and flee before we were encircled.

The order came too late. A dozen of us wound-up behind enemy lines for three days.

Around midnight of our trek, we noticed a group of buildings that looked like a detached farmstead. Hoping to find something to eat, we approached it cautiously. Suddenly, we were greeted by a salvo of mortar rounds fired in our direction.

Most of the shells fell behind our group, except one that exploded near us, injuring two of us. My wound was superficial: a piece of shrapnel tore through the right leg of my trousers, lodging against the shinbone. Luckily, I could continue to walk with the pack, limping, into the murky night.

We could hear the rattling of weapons as the front advanced before us. Moving only at nights, we ate sunflower seeds and sugar beets, keeping away from inhabited areas.

Not to be noticed, we slept in the middle of huge tracks of still standing corn stacks.

One rainy afternoon, we were surrounded by friendly light tanks reconnoitering in the area. Having picked us up, they crossed the front line at dusk. We were shot at by mortars only. Thank God, none of the tanks were hit.

Eventually, we found our unit and were shipped, by train, to Kőrmend on the Austrian border. There, we were measured for officers' uniforms.

On ^{November} ~~October~~ 15, 1944 (nearly sixty years ago), we were commissioned as second lieutenants.

Our class was the last one to leave this old institution as officers. And the first one to receive field uniforms only, devoid of embellishments, except a golden star to denote our rank.

Instead of presenting us with swords, as used to be the custom, we were issued Spanish-made 9mm caliber pistols, called Star.

On the order of the military Chief of Staff, I was to report to the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie's training battalion in Galánta, currently in the Southwestern part of the Slovak Republic.

To get there, I had to travel by horse-drawn farm carriages, occasionally by military vehicles for a few kilometers, and mainly, by "pedes aposolorum," i.e. on foot. The travel took three days which normally would have taken four hours by train. But by then, there were no trains running in that direction, the bridges over the Danube having been blown up by the Germans.

In Galánta, I shared a small room with another young officer at the home of a childless physician couple. We ate in the military compound at the officers' mess.

My first assignment was platoon leader to the battalion bicycle company. We supposed to be reconnaissance scouts, but because of the snowy roads, we spent our time dismantling and putting back the bicycles, day after day.

A month later, I was appointed company commander.

Each day, at the morning briefing, I had to announce that whoever wishes to serve in the glorious German Army, as a member of the élite Waffen-SS, should step forward. That individual will be promoted one grade immediately.

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We knew the meaning of the word "élite" very well: a notoriously ruthless shock troop, a cruel fighting force.

None of us ever volunteered to serve with them.

In November of '44, events started to change for the worse in a hurry.

Our German allies formally occupied Hungary and set up a pro-Nazi regime. Even the salute in the military was changed to the fascistic way.

Before the morning orientation, the puppet ruler's name had to be invoked. Because I didn't swear allegiance to him, I let the first sergeant do the saluting and the greeting: "Perseverance! Long live Szálasi!"

After the ceremony, I appeared from the building and gave orders for the day. This continued for about two weeks.

On one, for me almost fatal day, a huge Mercedes, painted khaki and flying the arrow-cross (Nazi) flag, rolled into the compound. A few minutes later, I was asked to report to the visiting dignitary.

The interrogation itself was in a private room. The colonel wanted to know if it was true that I didn't greet the company in the morning and I was reluctant to do the German-type salute. Somebody must have reported my actions (rather, my inactions), there was no reason to deny them.

The officer gave me a long argument to obey the law, however unpleasant it was. Do I want my parents to be harmed, do I want to end up in a concentration camp, forever ruining my career, he wanted to know.

Under duress, I capitulated. The punishment phase was in the presence of the corps of officers. The colonel severely chided me for insubordination and commuted my sentence: confinement to my quarters after duty hours for a month.

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The outcome of the investigation could have been worse, indeed, tragic for me. Frankly, I expected at least a demotion in rank. The confinement was merely a symbolic punishment. There was nothing to do, really, in that sleepy, small town, except to get drunk on rum, the only available drink in the lone tavern.

In mid-January of 1945, Budapest was already encircled by the Russian and Ukrainian forces. They occupied about half of the country and one-third of Slovakia.

Induction-age youth from the Galánta area and of upper Transdanubia were called up into a gendarme training battalion. The conscripts were called by the name of line-gendarmes. I was assigned to them as a platoon leader.

When I learned that one of my subordinate's name was Corporal Eisenreich, I rejoiced. Our platoon needed a German speaking translator. My happiness was short lived: the corporal spoke not a word of German, despite his Teutonic name and appearance.

On short order, we were packed and sent toward the West by train, to receive instructions in the use of the much heralded "Wunderwaffen" (i.e. wonder weapons).

It took us a week to travel through Czechoslovakia and the eastern part of Germany, due to the frequent air raids. Once, we had to get another locomotive because the original one was hit by a Lightning (did you notice the capitalization?). Eventually, we arrived at our destination: Hildesheim near Hannover, in Lower Saxony.

Our company was the only one having been quartered within the city limits. The others were housed in the surrounding villages. Actually, we occupied an old hotel with a non-functioning restaurant, on the hill called Wilhelmshöhe, overlooking the city.

What were those promised weapons, we never found out, we'll never know.

Maybe, they were the spades and shovels issued to our troop to help with the repair of the railroad tracks which were damaged by the bombers during nights. We often worked alongside Jewish concentration camp inmates, some of them speaking our tongue. They even kidded us occasionally for our unusual armament.

During a work detail, I noticed soldiers behind barbed wire fences wearing khaki uniforms looking at us. As I approached them, an elderly guard tried to chase me away. Telling him rudely: "Kannst Du nicht sehen dass ich ein Offizier bin" (Can't you see that I'm an officer), he relented, especially after I gave him a few cigarettes. By the way, cigarettes were used in barter, instead of the worthless reichsmark. There was nothing to buy with that money, anyway.

The soldiers turned out to be Nisei POWs captured in Italy around Monte Cassino. I told them who I was, and threw them the remaining cigarettes. Sadly, I could not take any of their names.

There were two German NCOs attached to us as military advisers. Sometimes, we did not see them for weeks. They never bothered to supply us with weapons. Our recruits never fired a single shot with a rifle.

The company thus remained unarmed, save the NCOs who carried WWI issue carbines, and the officers pistols. We received verbal instructions while in Hungary yet, not to fight the Western Powers, only the Russians.

After the provisions brought with us from Galánta were exhausted, we were at the mercy of our German hosts. The meager grub that we received from them was barely edible and inadequate. Their only excuse was that they did not eat any better.

Pity the American POWs, who were fed even worse than us by their captors. They still had enough wit and energy to parody the Nazi hymn: "Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles. Ein Kartoffel, das ist alles." (Germany, Germany, above all. One potato, that's all or that's it, i.e. to eat.)

Our innkeeper came to our rescue. Somehow, through connections, he bought a huge horse head on Saturdays, from which he prepared a nondescript colored soup of indefinable taste. A sliver of meat floated in the brew, enhanced with a few kernels of corn. We ate it with gusto, especially that the landlord sold us thin slices of coarse bread, generously sprinkled with sawdust. This was the special event we were waiting for all week.

The hunger compelled me to be a hunter there, for the first and last time in my life. With a target pistol, I shot four squirrels that were feeding on pine seeds, high above us in the forest.

On the spot, having skinned and disemboweled them, we fried the tiny animal carcasses on wooden skewers. They tasted resin-like and were rather chewy.

We ate them, nevertheless. A famished person cannot be choosy. (This is not a Chinese proverb, I hope.)

Because of the regular bombardments of nearby Hannover, we chose to sleep in trenches dug in the forest, covered with boughs of pine and dirt, rather than in the relatively warm building that was visible for miles.

One day, during broad daylight, we had an ideal place from where to observe an armada of planes releasing their deadly cargo above us. They dropped incendiary bombs glittering as they fell, interspersed with regular bombs to discourage the work of nonexistent firemen.

We watched, helplessly, as the phosphorous bomblets ignited the buildings of the inner city, which were constructed in medieval times from wood and mud. Everything, save the spire of St. Andreas church, burned to the ground within an hour.

We would have surely perished in that inferno, had the company commander not insisted that his unit be moved from the briefly occupied converted movie house in the congested center of town, to the outskirts of the city.

Nobody has an exact number how many died in the fire that day, but close to twenty thousand by some estimates.

That frightful and unforgettable day was March 22, 1945.

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One of the bombers blew-up above us, parts of it falling toward the blazing city, in graceful arcs. No-one parachuted from the wreckage. We never learned the cause of that accident. There were no anti-aircraft artillery units in the vicinity, and we saw no German fighter aircrafts attacking the bombers.

On one balmy spring day, returning from a railroad repair detail for lunch, the quarters duty NCO brought a line-gendarme belonging to my platoon front and center. This youngster reported sick in the morning and was caught in the act as he stole one of his comrades daily bread ration.

Citing such-and-such an article of the martial law, the company commander ordered me to execute the fellow on the spot, in front of the company, saying: "Lieutenant, shoot this man!"

Looking at the ashen faced, trembling youngster, not thinking of the consequences, I said calmly: "Captain, Sir, you have a pistol, too. You shoot the man."

"You mean the lieutenant refuses my order?" demanded the officer. "No, Sir," I answered now sarcastically, "I just let you execute this pleasurable act."

"The lieutenant depart to his quarters!" bellowed my superior. In my room, I listened for the sound of the pistol's bang. I heard none.

Later that day, the captain ordered me to write a record of my refusal, typed. He also imposed upon me thirty days of solitary confinement to my room, after duty hours. At least, I had plenty of time for the report's preparation.

Never having typed before, I must have made numerous mistakes. Each report I painfully prepared was handed back to me for corrections, clarifications, etc. I still would be typing if a turn of events would not have occurred.

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Would you believe that the young man who spoke Hungarian with a marked accent, his father being a Slovak, never approached me later. In fact, he shunned me for what I did, rather for what I did not do to him.

A simple "Thank you, lieutenant" would have been enough of him.

The event I mentioned was the urgent order to assemble all companies into a central village. To accomplish this, we had to travel over well camouflaged trails in the forest. To reach another forested area, we had to rush through an open field, squads at a time, hoping that we would not be noticed by the observation plane circling above us.

After three platoons reached the other forest, we started to hear the rumblings of tanks on the nearby highway leading into the city.

My captain wanted us to go to the nearby weapons depot, get some weapons, and put up a good fight, on the recommendation of the military advisors.

Lecturing my superior, I told him we were here for three months and our hosts did not supply us with any arms, not even a rifle. Would he fight with recruits who never even saw a weapon. I also dared to remind him that we had orders to fight the Russians only.

The captain turned red in the face and reached for his pistol. By then, two of my sergeants behind me aimed at him with their loaded carbines.

Putting away his pistol, the captain handed the company over to me, saying that he'll fight alone and departed with the German NCOs.

Shortly after the trio departed, we heard through a loudspeaker, in German: "German soldiers, give yourselves up. You'll be treated humanely."

The same message was repeated twice more. As we made no movement, shooting started immediately with Howitzers from the rear (later, we saw the spent shells) and by machine guns from the tanks about 200 yards away.

One projectile fell on a neatly stacked wood pile of the forester, around which we took cover. Miraculously, nobody was hurt even though we were covered with fire wood. The first sergeant begged me to do something, else we'll be surely killed there.

Waving my handkerchief wildly, I burst out of the thicket and began to run toward the tanks. To my surprise, there was an instant cease fire.

At the second tank, I reported to a tall, German speaking captain who happened to make the calls. He asked me why we didn't shoot back, and, secondly, why we didn't give-up at once, when requested.

My naive answer was, that our unit was unarmed consisting of recruits. Didn't he call over the Germans, I noted. I also pointed out to the captain that the spotter plane's pilot could clearly observe our uniform being khaki, rather than grey.

The captain then inquired if we suffered any casualties. My answer was negative. Whereupon he asked me to climb into his tank, and pushing a certain button on the microphone, call over the company from the two forests.

Relinquishing our weaponry, we were sent back, in formation and without escort to the next village, maybe a mile away, called Diekholzen.

The day of my surrender was April 7, 1945.

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Did I forget to mention that my pocket watch, a slim Doxa--graduation gift from my parents--is in the possession of a WWII veteran, who forgot to give it back to me, after he asked for the time.

I did not care a bit, having survived the Second World War.

In the middle of the village, a Military Police (MP) corporal lead me to a German speaking sergeant for interrogation.

The intelligence NCO wanted to know the situation in the city. All I knew that the town was to be declared a free city, due to loss suffered during the bombardment three weeks ago.

Noticing that his name was Jewish, I told him that we worked with concentration camp prisoners a few days before. I also mentioned to him that I saw Nisei soldiers not far from there. He asked me to show both of their locations on a detailed map. Within hours, we learned later, they were liberated.

After the interrogation, I joined the company in one of the larger classrooms of the school building. There were 50-60 German POWs sitting on the floor with us. Two MPs, in opposite corners of the room, watched us.

Maybe half an hour later, long lasting firing erupted outside. The Germans were convinced that the prisoners in the courtyard were gunned down. Not believing it, I peaked through the lowered blinds secretly. They were still standing there. The shooting was apparently directed to low flying enemy aircrafts.

As I was looking out the window, whenever the MP sentinels were not watching, I noticed one of our companies marching by on the road. Immediately, I signaled to one of the guards, who took me to the interrogator. Pointing out the marching unit to him, he released us to join the rest of the battalion.

Have I not noticed them, our destination would have been May-le-Camp, in France, an infamous POW camp guarded by equally mean foreign legionnaires.

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It is a shame that I do not remember the names of the Captain and of the interrogator. What if he was Henry Kissinger?

Following our other units, we were assigned to barracks of factory workers who fled a few days earlier. A company of policemen from Kolozsvár also joined us. Quite a few of them I recognized, having directed traffic in my adopted city.

About a week later, the company commander appeared unshaven, his uniform in shreds. Bragging, that he didn't give himself up, he tried to get back the company from me. He was driven off by the NCOs. We never saw him again. His name was Captain István Martélyi, doctor of criminal law.

We were in the English Zone of occupation. The military governor of Hildesheim, however, was an American colonel, named Smith. He served in Budapest, as military attache, for two years before the war.

The Colonel learned about our unit, and after we were checked for lice (only our left armpit was examined, obviously they looked for SS members among us, who had their blood type tattooed there), we were issued white armbands. For two months, we furnished guard duty for his office complex in the city.

Among the Colonel's subordinates, one was of Hungarian stock. This GI came to me often to dictate letters to his parents who, obviously, could not read and write English. I also read his parents' letters to him, because he could not decipher their writing, being in Hungarian. How I wish now I would have jotted down his address, especially that it was in Detroit.

The camp was in a forest. Beside us, there were Poles and Ukrainians who worked in the factory, neatly dug in the hill, as forced laborers.

We roamed the forest gathering luscious mushrooms. We also felled trees that were dead, for firewood. Otherwise, there was nothing to do, the war was still raging on in the Pacific.

Colonel Smith made a proposition to the battalion commander shortly after they met.

If the commander can organize a regiment, he'll see to it that it will be taken over by the U.S. Army en masse. After eight weeks of training in the States and another eight weeks in Hawaii, the regiment will be thrown in against the Japanese.

Due to lack of communication (there were close to a quarter million of us throughout Germany and Austria), we could not persuade enough soldiers including our recruits who wanted to go home. But going home, right after the war ended, meant a certain POW status by the Russians, especially for the gendarmes, albeit they were only conscripts.

Disappointed, the Colonel still inspected us on Saturdays and loved to watch us, as we marched passed by him, goose-stepping to the sound of bugles.

In the spring of 1946, all displaced persons in the area (we, too, got that status despite the fact that we were the last satellites of the Germans) were gathered into a centrally located DP camp.

Our next place of stay was in Holzminden, a charming small city on the Weser river.

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Only God knows what would have happen to us, had we been taken over, with ranks. One thing is sure: we never would have seen action due to the surrender of the Japanese in August.

Our battalion, with company of policemen and the staff of a Hungarian military hospital, began bidding time in a high-school complex converted to our lodging.

While in Holzminden, I received a post-card from my parents through the international Red Cross. Apparently, they heard of me from those who dared to return: mostly women, elderly men, or youngsters.

The text was short, containing a mysterious advice: "Stay in the hospital as long as possible." Why would they write to me such a message, I wondered, since the last slight wound I suffered was in Hungary, two years ago.

An older officer solved the riddle for me: I should not attempt to return home for the time being. That "time being" lasted twenty-seven years.

The outlook in the camp, indeed anywhere in Germany, looked bleak for us. We could not go back to our native land unless one fervently desired to spend a few years in Siberia as a POW first. We had no chance yet to emigrate anywhere. Even the English (St. John) Red Cross, who supplied us with provisions, could not secure employment for us.

We played cards for days at a time, then more cards. We had to occupy our minds somehow.

One notable event occurred, when one of my cousins, Ferkó, an eighteen-year old former military high school student, looked me up on the way to go home. The only useful thing I could give him for the long trip was a pair of Italian-style boots.

Not finding his family, he visited my parents and was adopted by them to take my place. A year later, Ferkó located his father, but decided to remain with my brothers.

Having nothing to do in the camp, some of my more daring friends started to scout around in the U.S. Zone of occupation, later in the French.

There, to their surprise, they found entire Hungarian units in the service of the Foreign Legion. For some mysterious reason, our government forgot to declare war on France.

Returning from of their excursions already in French uniforms, my buddies painted an unbelievable picture: nice garments, salary in francs, ample of food with a liter of wine a day, and a ration of cigarettes, called Corporal. (I must hastily add that I sold my wine and cigarette rations, months at a time, to an alcoholic legionnaire.)

Some fifty of us hopped on a train toward Saarbrücken, in the Upper French Zone, to be processed into an auxiliary guard unit, an offshoot of the Foreign Legion.

After having a fiery dispute with a peppery little Corsican adjutant (a grade higher than a master sergeant) because I claimed I had no profession, he pronounced me an active officer. True, I still wore my gendarme uniform with the star and insignia.

He told me, then, to eat at the officers' mess that evening. Next day, I became the company clerk, with the rank of corporal, due to my neat and nice printing.

Eventually, a year later and at another installation, I became the battalion postmaster, as a sergeant.

Among my duties as company secretary was the preparation of week-end passes. Having plenty of time, I "created" a few unorthodox laissez-passer. There were, luckily, several cities with the same name in the French as well as in the American Zone.

After the company commander, a gray (we called the French by the color of their kepis, rather than by the word "francia" which they understood) signed and stamped the document in black, I let it be signed and stamped in red by the alimentary NCO, by the medical officer of the infirmary in blue, and, finally, by the Moroccan chief of the railroad station, in green.

The traveler with my colorful, stamp-adorned pass sailed through the customs, while those with valid but single-stamped document were severely scrutinized.

For eau-de-Cologne, perfume, and, especially, for cognac which we bought cheaply in the post exchange, the fellow with my pass bartered with American servicemen enough clothing to dress a squad, with the finest quality of army boots to boot.

Surprisingly, our officers didn't object that we exchanged the rough woolen outfit for the American uniforms, except, we had to stitch French buttons on them.

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How did we communicate in the garrison, you might ask.

The language within our two platoons was, of course, Hungarian. With the French officers and NCOs, the "guards," as we were called, spoke through an interpreter, a former French professor. Most of the French NCOs spoke pidgin-German, as we did with the various nationalities serving in the other units.

While we were working on the defense fortification at the Tisza river, the front line passed over my family in Transylvania. They were evacuated to a nearby village for the duration of the fall '44 bombardments. There, at least, they could trade clothing for food from the farmers.

Then, in August of 1945, my father applied for his retirement in Kolozsvár, by now called Cluj. He was asked to sign an oath of allegiance to the Romanian State, to be attached to his application. Refusing to sign it, for the second time, my family was deported to Hungary within 24 hours. They settled down near my aunt's village, in a dusty town, by the name of Nyiregyháza.

During my early service for the French, I started to exchange correspondence with my parents regularly. To my surprise, I learned from my mother that one of her second cousins lived in France. After auntie Margaret's several invitations, I visited them in Limoges. How did I succeed to change railroad stations in Paris, I still don't know, but apparently I did.

My aunt's husband, a wine merchant engross, took liking of me after several buying trips. On these, we were usually served with sweet vermouth first and some appetizers: stuffed veal tongue, tiny smoked sardines, pate de foie gras, and the like. Having prepared the taste buds properly, tasting of the wines could begin in earnest.

During the last dinner with them, my uncle not only proposed a toast but also, that he was willing to adopt me, having had no children of his own.

Somehow, with my limited vocabulary in French, I courteously rejected his kind offer. (Most Frenchmen, being chauvinists, distrusted foreigners.)

His name was Benoit Reculet. R.I.P.

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How fortunate that my family had to leave Romania. They would have suffered hunger, cold, and misery through the draconian decrees of President-for-life Ceaușescu, for long decades.

Our unit's duty was to guard German POWs as they took-up the mines laid by the Germans, French, even the Americans. After the area around Saarbrucken was cleared of the mines and the German fortifications, part of the Siegfried Line, were destroyed, we were transferred to Trier. Next, we moved to Bad Kreutznach, to process and release the POWs.

To see the world, I volunteered to be on one of the slow-moving convoys that took 2000 prisoners to be released in the Hamburg area. I am still convinced that I got the yellow jaundice during that trip, eating only cheese and very little bread.

My last place of duty was in Freiburg, close to Switzerland. There, we guarded the military airport. After rainy days during the spring, we were asked to gather snails, preferably from vineyards. They tasted superb, prepared with parsley-leaves and butter, served on a plate covered with hot salt.

Then one day, we received a huge dose of medication, injected of course, against malaria, typhus, etc. I suspected we might be sent to Indochina shortly.

The proverb, in Latin: "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (Sweet and dignified/meritorious/befitting is to die for one's country), was carried out too many times by countless true patriots. Somehow, I felt that this aphorism did not pertain to me: France was neither my mother country nor my fatherland.

Because I was weakened by the yellow jaundice, I applied to emigrate to the USA. My mother's relations, living in Detroit, set the procedure in motion. In due time, I received the affidavit and sailed out of Bremerhaven on the S.S. Gen. Charles Muir, a troop carrier. The trip lasted eleven long days.

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I still wore my French uniform (the only clothes I had), when I set foot on American soil, in New York harbor, on August 13, 1949.

The train trip from New York to Detroit lasted through a night. My relatives greeted me at the depot. I stayed with them for a couple of weeks only.

Next day, they took me to a shopping area, where I got my first civilian outfit in years. I marveled when the salesman, taking a good look at me, returned with a perfectly fitting suit. It cost me, rather my uncle, \$39.50 at the Federal clothing store.

Not knowing a word of English, I could not get a job right away. The neighbors hired me to wash their walls for a few dollars. When I got my first job with General Motors, I moved to the Hungarian subdivision of Detroit, called Delray.

Looking back, I forgot how much I made as a press operator. It was, apparently, enough to buy my first car, a relatively small vehicle, called Henry J. I also could afford to send food packages to my parents regularly.

One morning, there was a crowd at the huge stamping press I worked on with a Polish emigrant. During the night-shift, the press malfunctioned and a college kid, working as a summer hire, lost eight of his fingers. His crushed glove tips were still there on the floor.

Reluctantly, we started our shift. Half a dozen engineers watched every time the press came down, as we touched the buttons above our heads. It refused to repeat what happened: to come down twice.

Shortly after the engineers left, the press came down on its own. Anticipating it, we quickly pulled our hands back, before grabbing the finished piece.

We called back the engineers immediately. They swore it could not happen again.

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That was my last day at the plant. I would have been laid off soon, anyway.

By now, I could converse haltingly in English, with an accent, of course. (Even today, fifty-some years later, I have a noticeable one.)

My next door neighbor, an elderly Italian immigrant, learned the language of his immediate vicinity: Hungarian, with an accent, of course. He spoke very little and very bad English, living in Delray for thirty years.

Not wanting to follow his example and having no job outlook for a while, I decided to sign-up with the Army. A foreign-born had to have his green card to join, which I had by then.

Although I was almost twenty-nine years old, they took me. Interestingly, recruits in Detroit were taken to Fort Custer, in Battle Creek. At that time, I would not have thought that I'll be living there. The Fort was a booming, busy installation at that time, housing in excess of ten thousand soldiers. The day of my enlistment was Jan. 21, 1952.

After getting our uniforms, equipment, and going through a series of indoctrination, some of us were bused to Fort Knox, in Kentucky, for basic training.

The inductees took a battery of tests to determine their capabilities and aptitudes. I must have done all right, because a dozen of us, mostly college graduates, were asked to report for another series of tests next day. Those, who passed this test, could attend the Officers' Candidate School (OCS), if they desired.

Diligently working on all questions, I went back several times to the ones I couldn't solve at once, thus losing precious time. I simply could have skipped the difficult questions or could have given the wrong answer, concentrating on the easy ones, completing more questions.

Even this way, finishing only three-fourth of the test, my score was 118, two points below the cut-off point.

Eventually, I was assigned to an infantry training company.

Because there weren't enough NCOs, due to the Korean conflict, and because I was (at least 6-7 years) older than the regular inductees, the company commander appointed me as acting platoon leader.

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Had I known how to take tests, I would have surely passed that of the OCS. Maybe Brother Joseph's prediction would have come true. But at what price: I probably never would have met my wife.

Truthfully, I am satisfied the way the course of my life evolved. In fact, I wouldn't want it in any other way.

During a drill session, something went wrong. I felt, I had to punish the platoon by doing a series of "on your stomach - up" exercises, which I executed with them.

Unnoticed to me, a jeep pulled-up behind me. A few minutes later a raspy voice addressed me: "Soldier, report to me!"

Turning around, I saw a full colonel by now standing in the vehicle.

First, I gave order to the platoon to fall into formation, then to present arms. Only then did I report to the officer. Looking over the platoon, the colonel told me to put the platoon at ease.

The colonel inquired if I served in the German army. I told him, he was not far off, having been trained similarly in the Hungarian.

The officer then remarked, that if he'd have one thousand soldiers like me, he could conquer half of Asia. "However," he added almost begging, "these recruits should be handled with care, as if they'd be boys scouts, else they write to their congressman, and I'll be in trouble."

After his remarks, the colonel shook hands with me and departed. Later, I found out that he was responsible for the conscripts' training.

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Hopefully, it does not sound like bragging if I tell you, that toward the end of lengthy marching practices, I carried two M1 Garand rifles on my shoulders. Most of the trainees, namely, had difficulty marching for extended periods.

Couple of weeks into basic training, a well decorated master sergeant came to the company office and wanted to talk to me.

When we were left alone, he asked in my native tongue if I were a "Magyar" (i.e. Hungarian). "So am I," he replied to my "Igen" (i.e. Yes) answer, shaking my hand.

Not only that, but his last name was the same as mine. He happened to be the personal chauffeur to the commanding general of Fort Knox.

Sergeant Bartha wanted to know if I'd like to meet his family in Dayton, Ohio. How could I say no, when this meant several weekend passes which, normally, were not available to rookies.

He drove me to Dayton a couple of times. I even attended church service with his family in a Hungarian Reformed Congregation.

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Finally, I can remember the name of an American serviceman.

Recently, while reliving old memories, I decided to call Sergeant Bartha in Dayton. Unfortunately, I could not locate him. He either retired somewhere else, or departed for the eternal hunting ground.

Toward the end of basic training, I was made general-for-a-day. (Brother Joseph was right, after all, even though for a fleeting moment in my life.) Touring with the commanding General, we inspected the troops. Sergeant Bartha drove us around the enormous camp.

At the conclusion of our training, I met Brigadier General Williamson again. He was the one, who introduced me to the new group of inductees in the base auditorium. The General praised me for my exemplary leadership, choosing to serve my new country as a private, having been an officer before.

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The company I trained with got the order to be shipped to Korea. My order specified a tour of duty in Europe, as a translator/interpreter. Previously, I passed three language tests, administered by the Army: Hungarian, German, and French.

This time, I returned to Germany what I wanted to be years ago, an American soldier. As an irony of fate, my group was one of the last to be awarded the Army's Occupation Medal of Germany. I also received the National Defense Service Medal at my discharge from the armed forces.

My first assignment was: interpreter to the commander of a tank company, attached to an infantry regiment in a small village, near Augsburg.

During maneuvers, our tanks often caused considerable damage to the fields, orchards, and forests. The loss sufferer had to present his grievances through me. The captain not only understood everything, but his German was far better than mine. He never would divulge that he spoke their language.

Learning that I used to be an officer, the captain said to me in German "Du kannst mir ruhig Du sagen." Translated loosely: "You can call me by my first name." Provided, of course, that we were the only present.

The NCOs of the company also heard that I served for the French, in a similar grade. We became buddies, being of the same age even. Consequently, I didn't have to serve as a KP (kitchen police), working an arduous twelve-hour shift.

After I finished a six-months long course in radio repair, I was promoted to corporal and became the communication chief of the company, later as a sergeant. I had my own half-track vehicle, with a driver. The captain used to sleep in the hind part of the truck on maneuvers, sharing it with me (rather, vice versa).

Because the tanks could not be moved readily by rail, at times, we spent two months away from the barracks.

On such a lengthy bivouac, a jeep came one day to take me to the American Consulate in München (Munich). The reason: to obtain my citizenship.

My only regret is, even now, that I had to appear in fatigues for the ceremony, on Aug. 26, 1954.

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Not too many naturalized citizens can claim that they received their citizenship overseas.

The Christmas season of 1954 approached quickly. Those of us who enlisted in the month of January were offered to be discharged a month earlier.

We traveled by train from Munich to Livorno (Leghorn), in Italy. We sailed through the Mediterranean Sea by another troop carrier ship, saying good-bye to Europe, passing around Gibraltar.

We took a train-ride from New York, this time to Chicago. We were discharged there, on Dec. 17, 1954.

Four of us from the Detroit area hired an idle sailor to take us home by car. We were dropped off, on by one, at different parts of the city, despite the pitiful state of the wintery roads.

My friend and former classmate at the Academy, Béla Gergő, didn't expect me to be back that early. A few days later, he introduced me to our landlord: the pastor of the Hungarian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Delray.

To my surprise, I recalled not only the minister's face, but his name also. Rev. Julius Asbóth, namely, conducted religious worships at our Academy occasionally. He was the protestant military chaplain to our rival, the Technical Military Academy.

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It was at that fateful occasion, that I met the minister's daughter, a high school student named Ilona, who became my wife three and a half years later.

After a month of settling down, I decided to attend Wayne University (later changed to Wayne State).

Some of my friends worked for GM as stylists. They encouraged me to pursue my study in industrial design, hoping to get a job with them.

As a veteran, I received government aid: \$110 per month. This sum was enough to pay for my tuition and books for a semester. Sometimes, I carried 16-18 credit hours, mostly of design courses. I even attended school during the summer recess, to graduate earlier. Naturally, I had to fulfill mandatory subjects, such as English, government, etc.

Meanwhile, I started to court my future fiancée devoutly. As soon as I had a diploma in my hand, I asked her hand in marriage. But I had no job yet.

During my senior year, I showed my portfolio to the GM design supervisor. He liked, what he saw, and encouraged me to apply for a job, after my graduation.

When I presented myself to him, at the end of Jan. '58, the chief said that he had to lay-off several designers, with long seniority, due to the recession.

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There I stood, speechless. I never went back, and, for thirty years, I never bought a General Motors car.

During the Eisenhower recession, there was no job available for a recent graduate, especially with no experience. Finally, in May, a government job was offered to me by the Rock Island Arsenal, in Illinois, as a statistical draftsman, later as a technical illustrator.

Finally, we could get engaged and got married on July 5, 1958, the happiest day of my life, and started our lives together.

Our delightful and precious children, Charles and Suzanne, were born there, on each side of the mighty Mississippi.

Four years later, we had a chance to move back to Michigan, a new agency having been created in Battle Creek. But first, I had to work for three months in Washington. Meanwhile, my family stayed with my in-laws in Detroit.

We were reunited in February of '63, in Battle Creek. First rented, then bought a small house on Pleasantview Drive. Our second home was on Thorncroft Avenue, which we owned for twenty-five years.

While there, our children grew up. After finishing their education, they married, and have their own adorable and charming children.

Working for the Defense Logistics Services Center, I had the following positions: general illustrator, forms control officer, computer programmer, and, for the last ten years, senior systems analyst for the Federal Cataloging effort.

Upon my retirement in May, 1986 after thirty-one years of service, I commuted to Chicago for a year, to work in the private library of Chef Louis Szathmáry, an old schoolmate from Sárospatak. He owned a restaurant named "The Bakery" on North Lincoln Avenue.

After that, for two years, I worked as a consultant for several computer software companies, on the recommendation of my former commander.

We moved to our condominium on Woodbridge Lane at the end of Jan. 1998. Hopefully, we don't have to move again.

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You know the rest. I scribbled enough already.



Hung. Royal Gendarmerie
No. 79033

CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY

2nd Lt. Károly Bartha
is an active member of the
Hungarian Royal Gendarme
Battalion.

Galánta, Jan. 1, 1945.
(signed) Col. Barabás



Note:

Károly, my baptismal, Christian, or given name in Hungarian, is given last, without a comma, preceded by the family name.

It is derived from the Latin Carolus and is the basis for the German Karl or Carl, and the English or French Charles.



In French
Uniform

My U.S. Army ID

