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Polish Winged Hussar
1576–1775
Author's note

Although the history of the Polish 'winged' hussar spans nearly three centuries, for reasons of space this book concentrates on their heyday from 1576 to 1709. The term 'Polish' is used (with apologies) to cover all the diverse ethnicities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Not wishing to inflict Polish grammar on innocent readers, I have occasionally Anglicized the plural endings of some Polish words. For a general background to the army of this period see R. Brzeziniski, Polish Armies 1569-1696, 2 vols, Osprey MAA 184 & 188 (1987). All translations from source texts are by the author, and all images are from the author’s collection unless specially credited.

Author's acknowledgements

This book is the product of nearly 20 years of research in Poland and throughout northern and central Europe, largely from primary sources. There is much new material and many images previously unseen even in Poland. Over the years I have benefited from conversations with some of Poland's leading military historians, including Zdzislaw Zyguński, Jerzy Teodorczyk, Miroslaw Nagelski and Robert L. Frost. In Sweden assistance was provided by Arne Danielesson, Eva Turek, Fred Sandstedt and Lena Engqvist-Stanstedt of the Armémuseum, Nils Dreholt of the Livrustkammaren, and in England by Danuta Szewczyk-Prokurat at the Fawley Court Museum. I also wish to thank Andrzej Dziedziołowicz and Bohdan Wdowicki for details relating to the Stockholm roll, and re-enactors from the Zagloita's Tavern Yahoo group for practical advice on the construction of hollow lances. My warmest thanks go to John Rohde and Keith Roberts for suggestions that have greatly improved the book, and to Nick Sekunda for his moral support over many years, as well as generous assistance in taming the text, and to Joanna de Vries of Osprey for her hard work and saintly patience in bringing this book into reality.

Dedication

For Zofia Stepkowska, in memory of Jerzy Teodorczyk 1930-2005, an inspirational historian at the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, who always had time for everyone.
POLISH WINGED HUSSAR 1576–1775

INTRODUCTION

It would be futile to tell of the grandeur and beauty of this cavalry; to speak of their costumes, their tall lances with long pennants, their tiger skins and exotic horses with saddles, stirrups and reins dripping with gold, embroidery and precious stones; to do so would only diminish their beauty. It is a chivalry that has no equal in the world; without seeing it with your own eyes, its vigour and splendour is impossible to imagine. (Italian envoy Cosimo Brunetti, after witnessing Sobieski’s coronation parade in 1676)

The Polish ‘winged’ hussar was certainly among the most spectacular soldiers of all time. To Poles he is much more – a symbol of justifiable pride in military achievements and of a bygone age when the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was geographically the largest nation of Europe, stretching from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea.

The Polish hussars have become the stuff of legend, but as with many national traditions (like the Highland clan tartan), many facets of their story were greatly embellished in the 19th century. The most obvious case in point is the wings. Modern illustrators habitually depict the hussars with pairs of colossal wings that arch forward over the head. Yet such wings leave hardly a trace in contemporary art. As we shall see, the inescapable reality is that in the era of great victories (1577–1621) the hussars wore a less spectacular saddle-mounted wing. Similarly, it may alarm some to discover that most of the highly decorative suits of hussar armour that filled Poland’s museums were not used during the ‘golden age’ of the hussars, but date from the 1630s and later.

It is also time to reassess one or two other accepted ‘facts’ about the Polish hussars – for example that these heavily armoured horsemen were able to change formation during a charge, and, thanks to their extra-long lances, to ride, almost nonchalantly, over pike-armed infantry. Such claims are sheer fantasy.

Nevertheless, the Polish hussars were exceptional. Most European nations abandoned the heavy lancer soon after 1600, but the Poles continued to employ them with some success right up to the Great Northern War of 1700-21. This is a phenomenon that needs explaining.

The object of this book, then, is not to ‘diminish the beauty’ of the hussars, but rather to show them as they really looked, lived and fought, ‘warts and all’. Thus the basic equipment of ordinary hussars is shown, not the jewelled weapons and kusakia scale armour of senior officers. Even so, there is more than enough splendour to go round.

OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE HUSSAR

The Polish hussar was a hybrid, the offspring of a complicated mix of eastern and western ancestry. The armies of medieval Poland by and large had been western in character, with the lance-armed knight (kopcis), in plate armour forming their backbone. This began to change as Poland established dynastic links with Lithuania – then a vast state that sprawled into the Russian steppe, with an army shaped by Mongol, Russian and Byzantine practices. After the Union of Lublin in 1569, Poland and Lithuania became a ‘Commonwealth’ (Rzeczpospolita), ruled by a single elected king and one parliament (the Sejm) but fielding independent armies. Strong new tendencies were felt in the 16th century as the Commonwealth’s southern borders came under threat from the Ottoman Turks. The once-powerful Serbian and Hungarian realms had already been consumed by the Ottoman advance, but centuries of Balkan resistance had fashioned a new troop type that was to survive and thrive in Poland – the hussar.

It was once believed that the first hussars were Hungarians recruited from one in 20 peasants (named from husz, meaning 20), and fighting in a style copied from the Turks. But their origins go back much further. Tenth-century Byzantine military manuals mention light cavalry known as chosari or chonsari, recruited from Balkan peoples, especially Serbs, and ‘ideal for scouting and raiding’. Their name, now routinely translated by Byzantine historians as ‘hussar’, probably derives in turn from cursus – ‘runners’, a late Roman class of light cavalry.

This Balkan light cavalry survived the shrinking of the Byzantine empire, though the Serbian articulation of their name, guzar, took on...
the nuance of ‘bandit’. In the 14th century the medieval Serbian state, known as Rascia after its heart at the fortress of Ras (modern Novi Pazar), fell to the Turks, many ‘Rascian’ hussars found refuge in Hungary where they helped defend the southern border against the advancing Ottomans. The Hungarians spell their name as huszár.

**Early hussars in Poland**

The first hussars to appear in Poland were also Serbians (Polish Raci). In 1500 several individual ‘Rascians’, each with a small retinue, appear in the pay records of the army of the royal court. Recruitment was quickly extended to Hungarian peasants, and in December 1500 the first full companies of huszarrum alias racevezi were raised. Their name in Polish was usually spelt hasar, less often husar. The term huszár soon emerged in army registers – alongside cavalleria – as a collective plural form.

The hussars of the Serbian style were unarmoured, relying on a large asymmetric ‘Balkan’ shield for defence and a light lance for attack, and were identical in appearance to the Stradiots or ‘Albanians’ in Venetian service (recruited, in fact, throughout the Balkans). They were quickly replaced by an armoured Hungarian style of hussar, which had emerged under the influence of Turkish sipahi cavalry in the early decades of the 16th century. In Poland these ‘heavy’ hussars were described by the acronym ‘p.p.t.d.’ – pancer, przycica, tarcza, dzewno (mail-shirt, helmet, shield, lance). Hussars armed in this manner formed 56 per cent of the cavalry at Jan Tarnowski’s splendid victory over the Moldavians at Obertyn (1531). In Polish western influence remained stronger than in Hungary and until the 1550s hussar companies included a diminishing percentage of lancers, fully armoured in western style, alongside the hussars, who themselves often wore western items of armour.

In 1576 the Transylvanian prince Stefan Batory (Báthory) was elected king of Poland. He standardized the equipment of Polish hussars to conform with his personal guard of 400–500 Transylvanian and Hungarian hussars. The Balkan shield was abandoned and most hussars now had metal breastplates. The new model of hussar (see Plate A) was adopted throughout Polish and Lithuanian armies by the 1590s.

**Heyday of the Polish hussar**

At the battle of Lubieńcew/Liebschau (1577) during the Danzig rebellion, King Stefan Batory’s heavy hussar immediately proved itself a battle winner. He followed up with a series of victories over the Muscovite Russians (1579–82). Further successes came at Byczyna/Pitschen (1588) against a Habsburg army, and Bukow/Brocou (1600) over the Moldavians. Hussars now formed 75 per cent or more of the cavalry and seemed invincible on the eastern battlefield. Their greatest triumph was a series of dramatic victories against overwhelming odds over the Swedes at Kokenhagen (1601), Weißenstein (1604) and Kircholt (1605), and against a Russo-Swedish force at Kluszyn/Klshino (1610).

In the 1620s, however, the hussars suffered a crisis of confidence when facing the devastating firepower of the Swedish army newly reformed by Gustavus Adolphus. In response, the Poles recruited greater numbers of lighter cavalry and western-style infantry and by 1630 hussars rarely formed more than 30 per cent of the cavalry. The hussar’s ascendancy was further challenged during a series of foreign invasions and civil wars that began in 1648. The Ukrainian Cossack Rebellion of 1648–54 was especially traumatic, and the hussars proved to be of limited value against the huge wagon-forts employed by the Ukrainians and the fast cavalry of their Tatar allies. At Batoh (1652) the veteran core of the husaie were captured and executed. About 1,000 hussars were recruited as replacements, but for the next 15 years the formation was a shadow of its former grandeur. During the ‘Bloody Deluge’ (1654–60) Poland was invaded by Swedes, Russians, Ukrainians, Brandenburgers and even Transylvanians. Swedish firepower again proved overwhelming. Against the Russians, however, the hussars’ lances continued to be effective, contributing to the victories of the ‘Fortunate Year’ of 1660.

The Turks too remained vulnerable to the lance. Jan Sobieski, first as Crown Hetman, then as king (1674–96), oversaw the re-nationalizing of the army to face the Ottoman menace, and raised many new hussar companies, some by ‘husarifying’ existing units of lighter cavalry. In an address to the Senate he called the hussars the ‘hardwood of western martial ... both an ornament and a defence ... which no nation other than the Polish has, nor can ever have’ (WZ 6, p. 78). Sobieski’s cheerful gallantry prompted a new confidence among his hussars, and they won a string of victories over the Turks and their Tatar auxiliaries, and when he marched to the relief of Vienna (1683) it was with the bravest cavalry that the Sun ever beheld (Sobieski, 1684, pp. 141).

Vienna was to be the hussars’ last great victory. The long Turkish war that drew to a close in 1699 had crippled the Polish economy; many troops received no pay for over a decade. The hussars were to fight again in the Great Northern War (1700–21), but undermined by the machinations of powerful neighbours the Polish state slipped rapidly into anarchy, and the hussars no longer had the discipline nor the will to make a difference. Nevertheless, the hussars survived most of the 18th century more spectacular than ever, albeit as a militarily irrelevant parade formation.

**RECRUITMENT AND ORGANIZATION**

The Polish hussars were organized along lines that were essentially medieval – derived from the same recruitment system formalized in the French Ordinances of the 14th century. The basic company-sized unit in Poland was first known as a rota, from the French rote or route, a contingent raised by a single nobleman. The French combined small
notes into bannieres of 100 for field service, and a similar practice survived in 16th-century Poland, where small notes were combined to form a chorągię, literally ‘banner’. By 1600, however, note and chorągię had become synonymous – both now meant ‘company’.

**Rotmistrz and towarzyść**

The commander or captain of a company was called a *rotmistrz* – ‘rotamaster’. He was normally a nobleman, from a land-owning class (possessionali) who at a minimum owned several villages, his wealth ensuring that the item did not immediately have to pay the entire cost of raising a unit. Many *rotmistrze* were wealthy magnates who further subsidized their companies to create an impressive bodyguard. Each of the two Polish and two Lithuanian hetman (generals) maintained a hussar company and drew pay as its *rotmistrz*.

The *rotmistrz’s* contract was known as a ‘letter of recruitment’ (*list przyznanii*) – analogous to the medieval French *lettre de révocation*. It was normally signed by the king, and commissioned the *rotmistrz* to raise a company of a specified strength, usually 100, 120 or 150 horses. Companies raised by hetmans and wealthier magnates could number 200 or even 300 horses.

The *rotmistrz* raised his company by contacting a number of *towarysci* or ‘companions’. Each of these assembled a *józef* (retinue), the equivalent of the medieval ‘lance’, to serve with him. The *józef* comprised, besides the *tovarysz*, a number of *pacholik* or ‘retainers’ – as many as seven in the 16th century, falling to two in the 17th, and one by the 18th century – plus an unspecified number of camp servants who did not appear on the unit strength. The *towarysz* was in a very real way a ‘companion’ of the *rotmistrz* – sharing the economic risk of raising the troops, and then serving alongside him on campaign.

The *towarysz* was normally a nobleman. The Polish nobility or szlachta made up 6–8 per cent of the population, and claimed to be equals, but were separated by vast differences in wealth. Many poorer noblemen could not afford their own horse, and only middle and high-ranking nobles had the funds to outfit themselves as hussars. Those who did so often enlisted out of a genuine feeling of patriotic obligation and a desire to protect the homeland, but hussar service was also an excellent means of social advancement, the first step on a political career path, and a way of getting noticed in higher circles. The typical length of service was three to five years. Wealthier individuals might purchase a place in the prestigious companies of the king or a hetman, enlisting for very short periods of just three months to one year, enough to give them the cachet of a ‘soldier-knight’. Younger sons, with little chance of inheritance, tended to serve for longer, becoming career soldiers. In difficult times, men of uncertified pedigree and non-nobles might also be accepted as *towarysz*, if they had the funds.

Hussar *towarysz* entered an elite fraternity. Every nobleman expected to be addressed as pan (‘lord’ or ‘sir’), but *towarysz*, *rotmistrz* and hetmans called each other pan brat – ‘my lord-brother’. To be a *towarysz* of hussars conferred an exalted status in society at large. As the 18th-century memoirist Kitiowic commented: ‘When all doors were shut to persons of lesser distinction at opera, balls or the royal chambers, *towarysz* were always permitted to enter.’

The hussar *towarysz* was a junior officer of sorts, but considered himself a cut above officers of the western model, particularly of dragoons and infantry, and could ignore their orders with impunity. When the *hussars* was abolished in 1775, the *towarysz* became legally equivalent to chorąży (ensign) in units of the western model (VI.8, F.155).

**Retainers and camp servants**

By the 1630s the typical *towarysz* received pay for three ‘horses’ or fighting men. Out of that money he raised a *józef*, a small train or retinue, related in meaning to a military ‘post’ or ‘watch’, which consisted of himself plus two retainers or *pacholik*. The *pacholik*, an obsolete spelling of *pacholk* (‘youth’), might be a member of the impoverished nobility, though most were from the lower, non-noble classes. Foreigners referred to them as valets, squires or servants – hinting at the unequal relationship between *towarysz* and *pacholk*. The *towarysz* had complete jurisdiction over his *pacholiks*. Their names were not even recorded on the company roll. He could hire and fire them at will, and owned their equipment and horses. Some *pacholiks* were clearly treated as slaves, receiving little or no pay, and occasionally deserted, taking the master’s valuable horses with them.

In the late 17th century the term *pacholk* began to be replaced by *pocznik*, or simply *pocznia* (‘of the post’). Modern authors habitually use the term *pocznia* for the entire period, or the still more anachronistic *szeregwy* (‘of the ranks’), which came into use in the 18th century.

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**Below:** A company of winged hussars of a member of the Leszniak family on parade. Costume details suggest an early 16th-century date (not c.1580 as frequently stated). The unit comprises ten *towarysci* (who march before the flag), an officer and a standard-bearer, three trumpeters and a kettle-drummer, and 20 retainers (in plainer equipment). Details of a print from the collection of W. Leszniak, published in his book *Życie polskie w dawnych wiekach* (1912).
The army was one of the few routes for social advancement. If a pacholik was able to acquire the necessary funds and horses, he could become a towarzys in a lesser status unit of panerny-husak cavalry, where pedigree was often overlooked. The more successful towarzys of panerny cavalry might in turn enlist as a hussar.

The towarzys also engaged camp servants to look after the wagons, tents and horses of his poczet. These were known as ciezy (singular ci-zia) or czedzis luza (‘loose servants’). The vast majority of camp servants were male. Army regulations forbade unmarried women from entering camp, and the noble wives of hussars would rarely deign to enter such surroundings. The wives of some poorer soldiers were less fussy, although several commanders, such as Jan Zamoiski in the 1580s, temporarily forbade the presence even of these. Sutlers and other females, including prostitutes, were always forced to live outside camp.

Since camp servants were not listed on the company registers it is difficult to quantify their numbers. Writers of the time estimate from one camp servant per fighting man to as many as four. A reliable figure is given by the engineer Narownick-Narowski (1659), who in his designs for the layout of the camps stated that each hussar company required space for ‘the same again or even double the number of loose servants’ — in other words, one to two servants per fighting man.

### Junior company staff

The rotnisz was assisted in his duties by a poručnik or lieutenant. Originally this officer was elected by the towarzys from among their number; later he was contracted directly by the rotnisz as his second. At first most rotnisze personally led their companies to war, and even those who were wealthy magnates accompanied the army on campaign. By the 1620s many such VIPs never served in the field, and the hussar rotnisz was now an honorary post, resembling the German Inhaber or owner-proprietor. The poručnik, a professional soldier, was now the actual commander. Though semantically equivalent to lieutenant, it was a far more important rank. The poručnik of a hussar’s or royal company had particularly high status and often commanded an entire army division. From 1775 a hussar poručnik became legally equivalent to the colonel of a western-style formation.

Though the post of towarzys carried prestige, that of poručnik was a huge step up the ladder, opening the way to a senior military rank and a civil career. The seniority of a towarzys increased the higher up his name was listed on the muster roll, and the closer he came to promotion to poručnik. The position on the roll was fiercely contested, and was a frequent cause of duels.

The hussar poručnik was himself often called upon to perform higher command functions, and by the late 17th century he often led his unit in charge of a ‘temporary lieutenant’ (literally ‘place-holder’). The choraz (standard-bearer) for the company was usually selected from among the younger, more promising towarzys, not necessarily one with experience — the post carried few executive powers. In the absence of the porućnik, command of the company often passed to a senior towarzys rather than to the choraz, and a senior towarzys would often be promoted first.

There was no fixed requirement for musicians, though a kettle-drummer and several trumpeters were often present on the company register, especially in royal and magnatival companies. On the Stockholm roll of 1665, Gostomski’s hussar company is shown with six musicians, for a unit described as 100 strong. The military reformer Aleksander Fredro proposed (in 1670) that these excessive musicians should be replaced so that each company had its own chaplain, barber-surgeon, locksmith (to repair firearms) and blacksmith. This would have brought the company staff up to par with units of western type such as dragoons, but was never implemented.

**Chaplains** and **barber-surgeons** do sometimes appear on the company rolls, but their presence was optional; other providers of specialist skills are rarely listed. Such services were provided informally by camp servants and porućniks who had been craftsmen in civilian life. For example, the hussar diarist Poczobut-Odlanicki mentions a certain Jurkowski (the surname of a noble), ‘a very good tailor’ who was serving in his poczet in 1660. Similarly, many staff ranks were replaced by an assembly of the company’s towarzys and officers, known as the kolo (circle). This acted as an advisory council for the rotnisz and as a court for the company.

### Musterings and pay

A hussar company entered service, much as in any army of the period: the men were lined up before army parliaments, who entered the names of each towarzys on to a company register, along with the number of mounted soldiers in his retinue (poczet). The company was then sworn in before its standard. The company register (or ‘muster roll’) was written down periodically and took the following form:

Register of the hussar rota of the Voivode of Kraków, Crown Grand Hetman [Stefan Potocki], beginning 1 April until the last of June 1658:

- **Poczet of the rotnisz:**
  - 24 horses
  - poručnik: 6 horses
  - choraz: 4 horses
  - Suchodolski Jan: 3 horses
  - Izdebski: 3 horses

**AABOVE** Polish hussars from the pamphlet Pobudka za czynnych szeregow (P對方 to worthy sons) (1620), which calls on patriotic nobles to volunteer for service against the Turkish menace. Attached to his kapalin helmet is a helmet-wing (forpa), worn instead of any other type of wing. Only mail sleeves are shown: armguards (karwasze) were just becoming popular. His koncer sword hangs at an oblique angle, apparently from the saddle pommel.
This company had a theoretical strength of 200 horses according to the 'letter of recruitment', but would be paid for 188 'horses' according to the register. The pochet of the rotmistrz-Inhaler often did not exist in reality, and this company was probably weaker still, numbering just 164 fighting men. Here the rotmistrz (Hetman Potocki) was allowed 24 'horses' for a 200-horse unit (12 for a 100-horse unit), the pay for which disappeared into his pocket. This was not a corrupt practice, merely a mechanism for covering officers' pay and other expenses. The porucznik (the actual commander) and the chorąży probably did have the four to six horses they were listed with, but even so the unit's real strength was nearly 13 per cent short of the official figures. By the late 17th century, perhaps 8–12 per cent of the 'horses' of the Polish cavalry as a whole existed only on paper.

The hussar's salary stood at 15 złoty in the 1570s and 1580s (18 złoty for hussars of the Court Army), paid quarterly, for each 'horse' of his pochet. Pay rose steadily in the early 17th century: from 20 złoty, to 30, then 40 and 50 złoty, fluctuating wildly during times of crisis, but barely keeping up with inflation. However, from the mid-1650s until 1717, salary remained static at 51 złoty, despite being more than halved in value by inflation (although a wartime supplement of about 10 złoty quarterly was added from the 1690s).

These were not the only payments received. The rotmistrz was paid kucharne (Latin cullinaria) or 'kitchen money', amounting to 150 złoty per quarter for a 100-horse unit. By the mid-17th century this was absorbed into the pay, giving the peculiar extra złoty on the figures. A 'winter allowance' called hiberna covered the costs of living in quarters. From c.1650 this was legally extractable from the host population – and often was, at gunpoint. Hiberna could easily double the hussar's salary, and as state debts mounted in the later 17th century, it became the only cash regularly received.

**State-paid, royal and private units**

The same general scheme for raising hussars applied to all the professional (zawiciene) army units. The state-paid army consisted of two parts. Firstly, the standing army or Kwaranci ("Quarter troops"), named after the fraction (actually one-fifth) of the royal revenues set aside to pay them from 1563. They were normally stationed in the southeast guarding against Tatar incursions, and their 3–5,000 strength included about 1,000 hussars. Secondly there were 'supplementary' units raised in time of crisis after the Seym had voted funds: these made up the bulk of wartime armed forces. In 1602 after most of the Kwaranci were destroyed at the battle of Batoh, the Seym introduced a unified system of Kompanie troops, so called after the Kompanie or 'state' at which the army was to be maintained. This had a peacetime state organized by territory – which could be greatly expanded in wartime. Unofficially, the core peacetime units continued to be called Kwaranci, long after this reorganization.

During the 16th century the king maintained a Court Army (wojsko nadworne) separate from the state army. Hussars formed an important component, especially after 1576 when King Stefan Batory raised 1,000 court hussars, made up of 50- and 100-horse companies, and commanded by a court hetman (Hetman Nadworny). The financing for this separate force disappeared in 1590 when the court treasury was separated from the state treasury. The king continued as titular rotmistrz of two hussar companies that bore his name (one each in Poland and Lithuania), but these were now on the state payroll.

Confusingly, the royal court continued to raise a hussar formation known as the courrier company (chorążyw dworzańskich), recruited from courtiers and fewer state functionaries, who each turned out a retinue for ceremonial occasions and accompanied the king to war. This exclusive company numbered 600 hussars during the 1600 Smolensk campaign, and 460 at Beresteczko (1651). It is the formation shown on the famous Stockholm roll (see Plates B and C).

**Below** The armour display in c.1580–1600 at Podhorze Castle, now in Ukraine. Despite losses in World War I and the Russian Revolution, the collection in 1939 still contained 39 hussar breastplates and 65 lances, equipment that had been used in the 18th century by the hussar companies of hetmans of the Rozwadowski family. The castle – one of Poland's great manorial residences – is now an empty shell, and the contents are dispersed in Ukrainian, Polish and Russian collections.
Many magnates bought private armies for protection and as ceremonial escorts. In peacetime these seldom numbered more than 100 dragoons and husar infantry, but several thousand more including superbly equipped hussars could be raised at short notice from client noblemen. Private units were often the first troops in theatre—as in the Swedish invasion of 1626 and the Ukrainian Cossack Rebellion of 1648. In extended conflicts they were often taken on to the state payroll.

The Popolite ruszenie or feudal levy of the nobles formed a last layer of defence for the realm and, in the 16th century, were still required to turn out as lance-armoured knights. By the 17th century, most were equipped as panzerne-kozak cavalry. Some individuals equipped themselves as hussars, but few full units of hussars were fielded. From 1620 several provinces raised their own district troops (wojsko powiatowe) in place of noble levy. These were salaried professionals and often included hussars, but also proved reluctant to serve far from home.

**EQUIPMENT**

The state contributed very little to the costs of equipping hussars. The towarzysz himself covered the bulk of the expense as a career investment. In 1659 Pocztobór-Odlanicki purchased a three-horse hussar for 1,600 szloty, ‘not overpaying, since I bought from my brother’. In terms of quarterly pay (at 51 szloty per horse) it would take him over two and a half years to recoup this sum. The ronstrz also invested a substantial amount when raising a company, and paid for items such as lances, leopardskins and wings, as well as subsidizing his towarzys. When setting up in a new company in 1629 the Lithuanian hetman Krzysztof Radziwill agreed to pay an extra 70 szloty per horse and to cover the cost of clothing the pacholiki. On rare occasions the ‘start-up’ costs were partly covered by the state; for example, in 1673 hussar pay was 200 szloty for the first quarter, falling to 51 szloty in subsequent quarters.

Both towarzys and ronstrz expected to recover some of their investment through pay and a share of war booty, but the biggest reward—especially for the ronstrz—would be a lucrative state office granted (for life) by the king. Many ronstrz were simultaneously granted the colonelcy of a western-style infantry regiment, the income of which helped offset the vast costs of maintaining a hussar company.

**Armour**

A new model of equipment was specified by King Stefan Batory in ‘recruitment letters’ issued for hussars of his Court Army in 1576–77. Their gear was to be in the Hungarian style, the armour being ‘properly made on the anvil from copper [i.e. brass] and iron’. In addition the hussar was to have:

- helmet, iron [i.e. mail] sleeves, lance, sabre, the weapon or sword which they call a ‘kornets’, a firearm [scopetum, pistol] carried on the saddle, feathers and other ornaments for splendour and to terrify the enemy according to the wish of each [captain]. (Pawinski, p. 54)

Batory was quite specific about the Hungarian style of armour, evidently intending it to replace the hotchpotch of western and eastern armour worn earlier. Its characteristic feature was the fully articulated, lobster-like anima breastplate that had originated in Italy, and was undoubtedly inspired by the loricata segmentata of Roman legionaries.

By 1600 breastplates began to take on a ‘half-lobster’ form, with only three or four bands or lames at the bottom. But it was only after the Turkish campaigns of 1620 and 1621 that the fashion for oriental weaponry really caught on in Poland, and the hussar armours of the style familiar to us today were produced from the 1630s—perversely, just as armour was being abandoned in western armies. The opulence increased further during the Golden Peace of 1638–48, and perhaps the most splendid turning ever achieved by hussars was in 1648 at the outbreak of the Ukrainian Cossack Rebellion.

Hussar armour was spectacular to contemporaries, in part because it was burnished rather than blackened to prevent rust as in western armies. It was not particularly difficult or expensive to make, and both the steel surfaces and the brass fittings appear crude from close up. The sheer variety of surviving types is evidence of the large number of small workshops producing it. Given a supply of steel plate (produced in quantity by foundries in the Kielce region from about 1600) or a western armour of obsolete pattern, any small-town armourer could knock out a fairly attractive suit of armour in hussar style.

Towards the end of the 17th century a workshop in the Kraków region was supplying large consignments of armours for captains throughout the Commonwealth, and it has been speculated that it produced many of thecanonical hussar armours, especially those with Carpathian highland motifs, such as heart shapes, still seen in metalwork of the region today.

The hussar’s helmet (szyszak, German Zischagge) for long time followed Hungarian patterns. Like the armour, it began to evolve typically Polish features only from the 1620s or 1630s. These included bronze fittings and rivet heads finished as rossets—symbols of the Virgin Mary—presumably invoking her protection.

The pacholiki in the rear ranks were given cheaper helmets such as the kapolin (Italian capellina), which had been popular in the 16th century. Most surviving examples are crude and apparently mass produced, though a few are better made, and Bielski in his Kronika of 1564 refers to hussars wearing ‘gilded kapolins fitted with feathers in decorative clasps’. The last Polish references of kapolin date from the 1620s, but they may have persisted longer: many have been recovered from the banks of the Vistula in Warsaw, probably lost during the panic Polish retreat across the river at the battle of Warsaw in 1656; several of these are now in the city’s Army Museum.

Batory’s commissions required hussars to wear ‘iron sleeves’ (manicis ferratis). These have long been a puzzle, but they can probably be identified with the szerszawne panzercone—mail sleeves—listed in armoury inventories. A few early pictures show these worn with plate gauntlets.
Unified uniquely connected with the hussars was the koncerz, with its long (130-160cm) blade of triangular or square cross-section. The weapon was western in origin; its German name Panzerstecher ('mail-sticker') suggests its ability to pierce ring-mail - 'Panzer' in this period meant mail not plate armour. This name was often shortened to Stieker, hence estoc in French and tuck in English. The unwieldy koncerz was slag on the saddle, under the rider's thigh and (in the traditional view) almost parallel to the ground. However, during the filming of Jerzy Hoffman's With Fire & Sword (1998), re-enactors complained of the discomfort the weapon caused when swung this way. Examination of contemporary art shows the koncerz often hung at an angle of 45 degrees from the horizontal.

The palas or palas, from Hungarian palas or broadband, though vouton by the koncerz, appears in the sources far more frequently, suggesting it was more common. About 90-100cm in length, it had a straight blade, single- or double-edged, and a sabre-type hilt. Hungarian and German pallas have straight blades; Polish ones are occasionally slightly curved. Confusingly, by the 18th century Polish sabers also used palas to describe a type of close-hilted saber.

Bows and firearms

While the mark of every Polish nobleman was his saber, the specific badge of a towarzysz, notes Kitowicz, was his bow. This is why late 17th-century images occasionally show hussars carrying elegant bowcases, even though firearms made the bow as good as obsolete. Dalérac remarked that many Polish nobles carried bows as part of their everyday attire, but few were able to shoot them with any accuracy. As late as 1710 Karwicki noted that the habit of taking bows on campaign in the Great Northern War was making Polish cavalrymen a laughing-stock among westerners: 'They should leave them at home', he comments.

The hussars were at first slow to adopt firearms. In 1525 each hussar was instructed to have a handgun (rasznica), and Hetman Jan Tarnowski's instructions of 1528 call this a long handgun (pistolem manualem longum). This was primarily intended for defence of the wagons and camp. Later instructions continue with this requirement for a long firearm, and various heavy-calibre wall-guns or hakbutts (hakownice) and muskets are often mentioned carried on the wagons.

The wheellock pistol came into widespread use as a cavalry weapon in the 1540s, but was taken up slowly in Poland, and into the 1560s no more than 30 per cent of hussars had them. Stefan Batory's 1576 commissions were instrumental in speeding up their adoption. Batory's official historian, Heidenstein, notes that at the initial muster for the Polock campaign (1579) cavalry fired their pistols as they defiled before the king, to prove they owned functioning weapons. Contemporary notes that hussars carried one or two pistols, but until the 1630s the commissions did not indicate that only one was required. Western lancers at this time also carried only a single pistol, bolstered on the left of the saddle pommel where it would not obstruct the lance. By the mid-17th century most hussars sported a pair of pistols, now much smaller and more reliable weapons equipped with French flintlocks.

The use of long-barrelled firearms by hussars is controversial. The historian Wimmer claims that by the mid-17th century the palsholst in the rear ranks no longer had lances, and instead had a carbine known
as a bandoleir after the leather shoulder belt on which it was slung. There
is, in fact, little evidence that carabines were carried so early: in reality
pachokils continued to employ lances, but when sent on foraging duty or
a raid would leave the lances behind and take up muskets from the
wagon. Dalėrėc created a myth when he stated in his Anecdotes de Pologne
(1, p. 22) that Hetman Jabłonowski had in 1689 abolished the lance in
favour of the musketon (a heavy-calibre carbine). This was just a
temporary measure when fighting the Tatars, against whom lances were
of limited value. The latest research (Wagner, 2, pp. 142–3) shows that
in the 1600s Jabłonowski repeatedly instructed hussar pachokils to have
both lance and bandoleir, so that they could be fielded with either as
the tactical situation demanded. It is only in the 18th century that pachokils
permanently set aside the lance in favour of the bandoleir or musketon;
towarzysze continued to employ the lance.

The kopia lance

The eastern lance or kopia, even more so than the wings, was the defining
weapon of Polish hussars. Indeed, contemporaries often called them
lancers. The kopia’s distinctive feature was its ball-shaped handguard,
described by foreign visitors as an ‘apple’ (French pomme), but called a
gulka, ‘knob’ in modern Polish. A one-use weapon, the kopia was
constructed of cheap, light wood such as pine or fir, the lighter the better.
The shaft was hollowed to further reduce weight. Re-enactors have
discovered that the best production method is to saw the raw wood billet
lengthways, scoop out the interior and glue it together. Cardinal Valenti
(1604) mentions that the two halves were ‘conjoined with the most subtle
sinews and threads of silk and the strongest glue, then painted in various
colours, to mask the artifice’. The French engineer and traveller
Guillaume le Vasseur de Beauapal mentions that the lance was hollowed
only as far as the ‘apple’, the lower part being solid wood. A veteran of
the Balkan wars of c.1600, quoted by the historian Jähns (p. 1,005), stated
that a ‘Copi’ (probably of Hungarian hussars) of 14ft 6in weighed just
4½lb whereas a 16ft 6in Dutch infantry pike weighed 5½bs.

The length of the kopia is given by contemporaries as anything from
13ft to 19ft (3.9–5.7m). The single, much-quoted reference by the
military historian Bronislaw Gembarzewski (p. 33) to a 6.2m lance
appears to be an error. His source, General-Major Kamphenhausen, in 1757
refers to a lance of nearly 3 szenen (arm-spans) length, but these are
ever 19th-century Russian szenen of 2m plus, but rather old Polish
ones of 6ft, giving a total length of 18ft 6in (5.3m). The typical lance
probably measured about 5m or 17 Polish feet, as recommended by
Fredro in 1670. (Polish writers quote length in ells, each of two feet,
which measured 0.576–0.595m in different regions of Poland.) The few
unbroken lances surviving in Poland are 4.80–4.90m long, but missing
their heads; a single complete example measures 5.02m including its
18.5cm head.

Lance pennants were uniform within each company, and often
followed the design of the company flag. Most were two-coloured,
typically red/white, blue/white, yellow/black or white/black. Non-
heraldic combinations such as blue/red and brick-red/black were also
seen. At 3.5–4.9m long surviving pennants are huge. When the lance
was lowered they would have touched the ground and become tangled in
the horse’s hooves. Though made of light silk they added to the lance’s
weight (especially when wet), and would become unmanageable in
wind. Presumably shorter pennants were employed on campaign.
Beauplan quotes a length of ‘as much as 4 to 5 ells’ (2.4–3.0m), Dalėrėc
of 3 to 4 ells (1.8–2.4m), but pictorial sources often show pennants just
1–2m long. Clearly there was no standard size.

The replacement of lances during a campaign was always a problem
and is mentioned after almost every pitched battle: ‘We badly need
hussar lances which none of us have, and it is difficult to obtain them
in this region.’ (Court Hetman Jan Zborowski to the king, three weeks
after Lubieszew, 1577.) ‘We broke all our lances: I doubt not that His
Majesty will have the army re-equipped shortly.’ (Count Hetman
Koniecpolski to the king, after Trzciana/Honigfeld, 1629.) The
situation after defeats was no better – at Górzno (1629) the treasuring
hussars left the field strewn with unbroken lances. During the ‘Deluge’,
supply was especially difficult. Prior to the recapture of Warsaw by Polish
forces in early July 1656, according to the cavalryman Jakub Los, ‘There
were no hussar companies with lances, while in our [Crown] army
not one had lances …’ At Matwy (1666) during the Lubomirski
rebellion, Los notes that in the rebel army only Lubomirski’s own hussar
company, in which he was personally serving, had lances.

Surviving contracts indicate that replacement lances were obtained
in major cities near the theatre of war. In enemy territory improvisation
was the only option. During the Russian campaign of 1660, the Polish
cavalrymen Jan Chryzostom Pasek and Los note that several hussar
companies used hop-poles with fire-hardened points, which they stained
with vegetable dyes and surmounted with linen pennants.

The kopia continued in use until the end of the hussar. As late as 1739
the Lithuanian Field Hetman Michal Radziwill ordered 300 lances
(though to equip all the hussars of the Lithuanian army) from ‘Hiss
Majesty’s kopis-maker’ Jakub Antonowicz in Lwów. These were to
‘paint black in cream, and silver with golden feathers’ – referring to the
small painted feathers seen on the shafts of most surviving examples.

WINGS

No other element of hussar equipment is more misunderstood or
obscured by legend than their wings. It is usually claimed that the first
mention of Polish wings dates from 1553 when three riders appeared with
‘silvered wings on their backs’ at the wedding of King Zygmunt II

ABOVE Koncerz (lack) with an early 17th-century Hungarian open hilt, identical to that used on sabres. This is a ‘black’ or combat weapon, with corded hand grip and wooden scabbard both covered with black leather. Total length including hilt is 130cm. The blade is triangular in section, (Fawley Court Museum, Henley-on-Thames, England)

ABOVE A hussar sabre with a fullered blade dated 1608 and marked with the initials and badge of Stanisław Stadnicki, castellan of Przemysl (died 1611). The fully closed ‘Polish’ hilt was added to the blade in the later 17th century to improve protection for the hand, and incorporated a thumb-ring that allowed faster recovery of the weapon after a blow had been delivered. (Muzeum Wojska Polskiego, Warsaw, photo Mirosław Chłomowicz)

RIGHT East European sword types from Marsigli’s Stato militare dell’Imperio Ottomano (1732): straight-edged patafla (D); koncerz with exceptionally long triangular or square blade (F), and various types of sabre (B, C, D). Traditionally, the word koncerz has been derived from khanger/hanjur, the Arabic dagger used by the Turks (A); but clearly the two weapons have little in common. More probably koncerz derives from a Slavic root: kucnexcâz, ‘painted’.
in Kraków. In fact, the passage in the royal secretary, Stanisław Orzechowski's panegyric about the event was mistranslated from Latin in the 1800s; in reality these three riders were merely 'decorated with lofty feathers of birds' (eaxis altissim sormum ornat).

It is not until 1574 that clear references to wings appear, in descriptions of Henri de Valois' coronation in Kraków. For example, Géle de Villemontée writes that the hussars have the 'custom of decorating themselves and their horses with large panaches, not of ostrich plumes like ours, but eagle's wings, striped with gold, which are so dense and so large in extent that they are made expressly for masquerades, or to frighten people.' Other descriptions of the coronation mention whole companies wearing wings attached to their shields and the manes of their horses.

By 1575 it is clear that some of these wings were worn on the back, but the overall impression is that all these early wings are of the same 'naturalistic' type worn by Serbian and Bosnian ali and gmeez scouts. When Batory standardized the hussars in 1576 he abolished shields – so removing one of the favourite locations for tacking these early wings. But, as mentioned earlier, the use of 'featherware' was a requirement of his recruitment letters. One intriguing possibility is that the shields were briefly replaced by wooden imitation wings, worn on the rider's arm, as in the Stuttgart carousel of 1616 (see picture on this page).

By the 1590s a new site for the wing had been found at the back of the saddle – on the left side where a single wing would not interfere with the lance. These early wings were made of a simple row of feathers inserted into a straight batten. By 1600 clear images of these saddle-mounted wings, occasionally worn in pairs, become so plentiful that there can be no doubt that this was the main type worn until at least the 1650s.

What then of the 'classical' frame wings worn on the back? The French diplomat Charles Ogier (1635) may be the first to mention these. He states that the hussars' dress is splendid, 'but it is difficult not to laugh at the sight of the long wings attached at their backs, which, they claim, scare the enemy horses and throw the enemy into retreat'. Unfortunately, the original Latin is too vague to be sure these are not saddle-mounted wings. The first reliable illustration of a back-mounted 'frame' wing is that worn by Colonel Szczechowski at Paris in 1645 (see pictures on p. 22).

During the crisis of the 1630s and 1660s wings appear to have fallen out of use. Lubomirski's Italian secretary Cefali (1665) wrote that the hussars 'had the custom of attaching huge vulture wings at their backs, which at the gallop made a great rustling noise; but now hardly anyone uses them.' Sobieski's reign saw a revival of the hussars, and wings evidently came back into fashion. Descriptions by authors such as Dalérac and a few rare pictures suggest these wings were now mainly back-mounted. For a detailed description of the classic forward-curved wings we must, however, wait until the 18th century, and the ever-valuable Kitowicz.

Hussar troopers had screwed to the rear of their armour a piece of wood reaching from the belt, high above the head, and curving over the head; inserted into this from one end to the other were a row of feathers painted in various colours, looking like a laurel or palm branch which made a strangely pretty sight, though not all companies used such laurel branches.

The conservative Lithuanians lagged behind, and Kitowicz notes that they continued to wear the old style saddle-mounted wings: 'the Lithuanian hussars ... after mounting the horse, fastened to the left side a huge wing made of ostrich feathers, which covered the whole side of the horse and the rider's leg to his ankles.'

What were the wings for?

The consensus today is that wings were purely a parade adornment, yet there is evidence that they were taken on campaign. In 1669 a Kraków craftsman commented that 150 złoty was a small sum for the 32 eagle's wings he had manufactured 'which each (hussar) for greater adornment is required to wear in pairs on the march', though he claimed he would have received more for them 'in time of need, such as a wedding or a triumph'.

During the Vienna campaign of 1683, the monk Brülg mentions Polish hussars 'each with two eagle wings ... more parading than marching' past his monastery 15km south of Brno in Moravia. So there can be no doubt that wings – like the hussar's elegant silk clothing and parade horse harness – were indeed worn on campaign. Such finery, states Kitowicz, was not worn on a daily basis, as it would quickly wear out, but was reserved for special occasions. In poor weather or difficult terrain (such as woods) wings would have been left on the wagons.

But were wings worn in battle? They are often shown in contemporary battle paintings, but these were seldom painted by eyewitnesses. Frustratingly, no one has yet found a single reliable, non-poetic eyewitness to confirm that wings were routinely worn in battle.

Did the wings make a noise during the charge? The short answer is no. This idea goes back to two foreign visitors – Cefali (1665) and Dalérac (1688) – neither of whom saw any action. There are also (poetic) references to wings on parade making a rustling noise, but these probably refer to a sort of buzzing sound in a strong wind. The
idea that wings made a noise loud enough to scare the enemy over the terrific din of a cavalry charge is patently absurd. During the filming of Jerzy Hoffman’s epic With Fire & Sword near Poznan in May 1998, the author personally witnessed repeated charges of 50 winged hussars and not a murmur came from the wings.

There have been several other theories on the purpose of wings. In his account of a visit to Poland in 1588, the papal legate Ippolito Aldobrandini stated that as well as scaring enemy horses, the wings protected against sword cuts. More recently T. Tilinger in 1949 saw wings as a defence against Tatar lassoes, imagining their original form was two vertical rails attached to the armour back plate, which gradually acquired feathers as decoration. Jerzy Teodorczyk in the 1970s suggested wings might be a souvenir – a sort of campaign medal – for units that had served in the Turkish wars.

Most such theories fall foul of chronology. In the mid-16th century, before they appeared in Poland, wings were worn (and their function therefore established) by Balkan deli horsemen. In Ottoman miniatures, deli often wear their wings in action. It is little known that the Poles had their own version of the deli – the clear. Like deli, clear was reckled daredevils, enfants perdu, whose function was to advance ahead of the main army and open the battle by disrupting the enemy, either by provoking him to charge first or by disordering his formation with a sacrificial charge. Their name derives either from Hungarian zöljéro – ‘riding foremost’ or from Latin eligere – ‘chosen men’ (see Plate E3).

Ad hoc units of clear, selected four from each hussar company and numbering about 100 men in total, played a prominent role at Pitschen (1588), Boucon (1600 – where they almost won the battle by themselves), Kokenhuisen (1601) and Gueizé (1607). With the increasing lethality of firearms their role was replaced in the 1620s by skirmishing light horse. However, writing in the 1680s after a visit to the Polish court, many decades after clear had fallen out of use, the French poet Regnard seems to have been informed of their original battlefield role:

The servants of the men [hussars] precede the squadron on horseback, with a lance in their hand; and it is very singular that these people have wings attached to their backs: they rush occasionally into the midst of their enemies, and frighten their horses, who are unaccustomed to such visions, and make way for their masters, who closely follow them.

The one element common in nearly all the accounts is that the hussar’s wings were intended to frighten the enemy. They did this not by any alleged whistling sounds but by visual impact. Horses are wary of unfamiliar sights, and one or two flustered horses might be enough to disrupt an entire enemy formation. Indeed the whole gear of the hussar – leopardskin, wings, fluttering pennants and dazzling armour – was designed to intimidate and overawe the enemy, much like the guardsman’s bearskin hat in later centuries. The wings and fur evoked a primitive visceral fear of predatory animals. This certainly is the impression conveyed by witnesses such as Heinrich Wolf of Zurich, who at Batory’s coronation in 1576 noted that the thousands of Polish horsemen were ‘so well covered with the pelts of sables, blymes and bears, that one might think it was an army not of people but of wild animals, riding winged pegasusas [the winged horse of legend] in place of horses.’

Ultimately, the wings lost their original purpose and began to serve as a sort of branch-of-service badge for the hussars. By the late 17th century feathers were even being painted on hussar lances. In a ceremony of 1646 we hear of ‘feathered units’ as a synonym for hussars.

**CLOTHING**

Hungarian styles of male costume arrived in Poland in the early 16th century; their adoption was intimately linked with the growing importance of hussars in the army. Indeed, for decades the terms ‘Hungarian’ and ‘hussar’ were interchangeable. At first Polish garments differed little from their Hungarian prototypes, though skirts grew longer and fabrics thicker in the cooler Polish climate. By the 17th century, however, many new garments in Tatar, Russian and Turkish cut were appearing in Poland, and fashions and terminology changed rapidly.

For most of our period, the hussar's costume did not wear uniform clothing, but dressed as well as he could afford. The modern stereotype...
Leopardskins and capes

One of the more exotic elements of hussar attire was the leopardskin. In written accounts tiger and panther skins are mentioned almost as often, but since few Europeans had seen such animals the terms were largely interchangeable. It seems that a feline pelt with spots was what was required, and if a skin did not have spots, they would be stained on.

The light pelts depicted on the Stockholm roll may well be snow leopards – once quite common in the Caucasus and Central Asia. On some pictures the leopard’s head is still attached to the skin, and the chronicler Rudawski mentions Poles wearing ‘lions with open jaws’ at the start of the Ukrainian Cossack Rebellion in 1648. On many pictures the skins look more like rectangular capes, presumably sewn together from smaller feline pelts, such as lynxes. Undoubtedly influenced by hussar fashion, spotted lynx-fur collars were all the rage on civilian garments.

In view of their cost, leopardskins were often supplied by the rozmira, or in the case of royal hussar companies, by the king himself. Many contemporaries mention that instead of leopardskins hussar padcholiks wore wolfkins. Again, these were usually provided by the rozmira. In 1621 the łowecz of Hetman Krzysztof Radziwill’s hussars wrote that he had only been able to obtain ‘47 wolf capes [degur vilczy]’ (Wisner, III, p. 95). This is further evidence of the recutting of skins in garment shape.

Several Polish battle paintings show hussars not in leopardskins, but in dazzling striped capes reminiscent of Navajo blankets. Before the advent of colour photography few Polish authorities had seen how splendid these capes could be called pelisses or kilims after a type of Turkish rug. The contemporary term was welens, from the Turkish velenese or velenece, a shaggy rectangular blanket with a long nap on one side often used as a horse covering, named according to the historian Tszcan, after the Spanish city of Valencia, the original home of the tailor who produced them.

Surviving velenese in Istanbul are white with garish striped patterns. Polish velenese were made of colourful fine-quality woolen cloth, although plain velenese for padcholiks are listed among the products of Armenian craftsmen in a statute of 1560 (VL 4, E358). Striped velenese are often mentioned in the early 17th century. For example at King Władysław IV’s 1637 wedding, 15 hussars of a pociet raised by the starosta of Miedzyrzec for the Courtier Company wore ‘scarlet velenese with stripes of yellow satin’.

To be fair to earlier historians, similar capes were later called kilims. During the 1658 Denmark campaign Pasek stated that the red kilims of the retainers of the Voivode of Sandomierz’s hussar company led to them being known as gypsies. Gypsy clothing at this time was often striped, which may explain the allusion.
The different animal pelts and capes worn by hussar officers, towaryszcz, and retainers caused much confusion among western leaders, leading Sobieski's Irish physician Bernard Connor, for example, to imagine he was looking at three entirely different classes of cavalry.

HORSES

'A Pole without a horse is like a body without a soul.'

(Old Ruthenian saying)

The Polish nobility were accomplished horsemen and loved their horses. Especially valued were oriental breeds with Arab blood, known generally as 'Turks'. The royal stud at Knyssyn near Białystok was one of the first in Christian Europe to breed these, and in 1565 stabled 5,000 horses of various breeds.

Hussar horses were perhaps not the destriers of western chivalry, but nor were they small animals. In 1568 the papal nuncio Ruggieri noted that Polish steeds were 'quite large ... slower in running than Turkish horses, albeit stronger and prettier than them'. However, he believed Lithuanian horses were 'much smaller and weaker than Polish ones'.

Until 1563 company registers specified the grade of horse owned by every cavalryman. While hussar horses were valued for compensation at 7-15 złoty, 'Turks' were valued at 30 złoty (Bieński, Sprawa rycerska, 1569). The desirability of oriental horses led Polish breeders to introduce Arab blood into existing stocks. In the 1950s the hippologist Witold Pruski noticed two intriguing trends. Heavy western breeds, generally termed fyz (Friesian), tend to deteriorate in the Polish climate over a few generations. Arabs, by contrast, put on height and mass, without losing any of their good looks and quality, and often become much stronger and faster. It would seem that in the 17th century Polish breeders balanced these divergent tendencies to produce a superb-looking animal that was strong, solid and fast. It was the perfect cavalry horse, and many thousands were supplied to western armies, especially during the Thirty Years War (1618-48), despite repeated attempts (for example in 1620 - VL 3 f.374) to ban their export.

After his experience in Poland in the 1710s Marshal Maurice de Saxe (in his famous Reserves) considered 13 hands 2 inches the minimum for mounting the armoured lancers, which he hoped to reintroduce in western armies. This appears to be the size for which much surviving hussar horse furniture was made.

Horses represented the single largest expense of raising hussars. In 1638 the horses of Radziwiłł's Lithuanian hussar company were assessed to be worth 120-300 złoty each (Wisner, III, p. 87). In the same year the last will of a Polish hussar, Jan Zabokrzycki, valued the three horses of his poszet at 220, 120 and 190 złoty (J. Szyński, Z życia słachty samodrzewy, 1910, p. 101). Another reliable figure is given by Porczobiat-Odlandzki, who in 1659 paid 300 złoty compensation for the dapple-grey horse of a fellow towarysz that he shot accidentally, although the owner claimed it was worth 600. So, averaged over the poszet, a hussar's horse represented about a year's salary.

Most hussar towaryszy took additional horses on campaign to spare their main mount, plus draught horses for the wagons; army regulations strictly banned the harnessing of war horses to pull these. There were always two or three times as many horses with each poszet as listed on the company register.

TRAINING

Every prospective towarysz was able from a young age to ride and to wield a sabre, both skills he learned at home. The system of training that produced the medieval knight survived in Poland, though it was fast disappearing, much lamented by Szymon Starowski.

Starowski harked back fondly to the knightly training he had witnessed in his youth. He wrote that 'on every holy-day' young noblemen would engage in a variety of 'chivalric' sports on their estates. 'Running at the ring' was a particular favourite - catching with the lance a small ring suspended from a wooden framework. Experienced lancers were able to pick up a piece of paper or a magenta cap from the ground. Other displays of skill included mounting a horse...
without touching the bow of the saddle, and lifting three lances together by their heads.

More reckless individuals risked their lives in the dangerous 'hussar' jousts with sharp lances, which took place al campo aperto – in the open field – without a barrier to prevent collisions. One of the last major hussar tournaments followed the royal wedding of 1605, though the Italian Antonio Ansalone in his Il cavaliere of 1629 commented that Poles continued to be addicted to this exceptionally hazardous form of jousting which he believed originated in Poland – not as a sport, but as 'an excuse to pointlessy throw their lives away'.

By the 1640s, however, Starowolski was complaining that the youth were growing soft. The reality was that most young noblemen had long since learnt the bulk of their military skills only after entering service. Recruitment letters required that the rotmistrz, when forming his company, was to base it around a core of veteran towaryszce. The 1609 Articles of War – the main regulations for the Crown Army – encouraged special attention be given to training the 'inexperienced towaryszce and pacholkisz', and also encouraged the rotmistrz to personally drill his entire company in formation as a way to 'more easily discern deficiencies in its horses and equipment' (WZ 5, p. 129).

Traditionally it is thought that hussars gradually worked their way up the hierarchy of the towarysz system, which is often compared to a medieval guild, with apprentices and masters. It is said that a young hussar started as a servant, then served as a pacholik, before finally raising a poczet of his own. But this is taking the analogy too far. It is unlikely that any nobleman would have started off as a lowly camp servant, keeping company with peasants. Few dirists give details of their earliest years of service, but Poczobut-Odanicky, for example, served on his first campaign aged 16 or 17, apparently as a pacholik while learning his craft.

The most important skill for a hussar to master was handling the lance while struggling to control his powerful mount. In 1676 Sobieski commented that the hussar horse required a severe bridle with a curb bit (murzatk), 'since it is difficult to use the second (i.e. lance) hand' (WZ 6, p. 78). In effect the mount largely had to be steered with leg movements alone. One exercise was regarded by equestrian writers such as Pieniazek (1697) as specific to the hussars. This involved galloping along a narrow marked track, and then turning within 3m circles at either end without the horse's hooves stepping out. This drill took several months to perform with confidence.

Horses and riders were accustomed to charging in formation in an exercise that altered little from the 16th to 18th centuries. The hussars were divided into two groups facing each other. The approach began, lances were lowered and the two formations charged each other at full tilt, passing through gaps left between them: 'It will appear as if the formations are fighting', commented Bielski in 1569. Soon after the battle of Vienna in 1683, Sobieski arranged a demonstration at the German emperor's request, apparently without prior rehearsal. According to the writer Drakowski (p. 73), Sobieski had 24 hussars divide into two groups, which charged each other, aiming their lances at the riders' breasts, and suddenly pulled them upright before impact, to the astonishment of the German observers.

The best 'school' of war was, of course, active service, especially among the Kawarzian regulars, who were on permanent station in the Ukraine on year-round alert for Tatar raids and unrest among the Ukrainian Cossacks. Des Nerays considered the Kawarzian to be the elite of the army, like the Praetorians of Rome. Attempts were made to circulate novice hussars through the Kawarzian to create a reservoir of skilled men who could be called up in wartime. But the massacres of the Kawarzian at Zolte Wody and Korusin in 1648, and again at Batoh in 1652, had a far greater effect than the immediate loss of manpower – like the Katyn massacre of 1940, they deprived the army of its veteran cadre for training. The effects were to be felt in a lack of professionalism exhibited by Polish troops in the later 17th century.

ON CAMPAIGN

Most major campaigns conducted by the Polish army followed a time-worn schedule. By the time the rickety machinery of state had voted funds to raise troops, and these had gathered at the allotted concentration point from the various provinces of Poland, a campaign rarely got under way before July. This meant that against Russia or Turkey decisive actions often took place in the autumn, and campaigning continued until after the first snows.

After mustering at the concentration point, the army's cavalry was divided into pulks (formations intermediate between modern regiments and divisions) and was reviewed in full battle order by the king or hetman. Behind the pomp was the practical need for each soldier to learn how his company slotted into larger tactical formations, and for commanders to acquaint themselves with the chain of command. Each pulk then marched off, often on a separate route to lessen the burden on the Commonwealth's rather inadequate roads.

Baggage and logistics

Polish armies on the march seemed chaotic to foreigners. Unlike western armies where the wagons were collected into a baggage train, each Polish company marched with its own wagons. Starowolski describes the 'tail' of just one small hussar company in his 'True knight' (Prowy Rycerz) of 1648:

Last year near the town of Rzeszów I came across a company of only 60 hussars, and counted 225 wagons, of which nearly half were four- and six-horse vehicles, not to mention the loose horses, women and children on foot who were countless.

The vast numbers of wagons and servants that accompanied every company were an effect of the Polish system of recruitment based around the poczet, which acted as an independent economic community. Another factor was the low population density in the Commonwealth, which made it difficult to provision any sizeable force from local supplies. Ultimately the towarysz was responsible for the feeding of his
poczet, and did so largely out of the stores stowed on his wagons. This was an advantage when it came to travelling through devastated regions or over the empty Ukrainian steppe, giving a high degree of self-sufficiency at minimal cost to the state.

The rotmistrz's recruitment letter often stated in detail the items every poczet was expected to have in his wagons, from tents of various kinds, down to axes and shovels for building entrenchments and latrines. A list of property lost at Zbaraz (1649) by Jakub Michalowski, Chorowy (standard-bearer) of the Royal Courtier Company of Hussars, gives some idea of the variety of wagons that a single poczet might own:

2 baggage wagons covered with red cloth [tilts] each with 6 horses,
A baggage wagon covered with leather with 4 horses,
A small wagon with a pair of horses,
A plain wagon with 4 horses,
A teleshka (Russian peasant carriage) with one horse,
An ox cart with victuals and with 5 oxen.

(M. Nageiński, Rachaje wojenne ... 1648–1651, Warsaw 1999, p. 358)

Many of the victuals carried on the wagons would be familiar to modern Poles, and included buckwheat (kasha), peas, dried bread (suchary), smoked meats, and hard cheeses of a type still made today in the Carpathian region.

One commodity considered indispensable was lard — the comic poem 'Albertus goes to war' (Wyprawa Pileńska, 1590) notes that besides its mundane culinary uses, lard could be used to prevent rust on armour, lubricate sword scabbards and soften leatherware; 'smear it on your lance just before action, and it will glister like freshly painted.' It could even be used to treat wounds to horses.

Wagons were progressively consumed during the campaign. According to the military engineer Dupont (p. 241): 'When a wagon is empty it is burned; the oxen are killed and the meat is distributed as rations. In this manner the army disposes unconsciously of the great number of wagons generated, which follow it at the start of a campaign.'

When the wagons were empty, provisioning fell, in theory, on sutlers who accompanied the army and on local traders. But the mere presence of an army often caused food prices to double or treble. Inevitably troops resented the price hikes that they could not afford and began scavenging for supplies, which quickly degenerated into robbery and worse. Contemporary records noted the inadequacy in logistics as the root of all indiscipline in the Polish army, and though some remedies were attempted — such as setting up magazines along march routes — the state treasury was too depleted to maintain them.

Camp life

Once the camp was set up, and each poczet was lodged in its tents, the towarysz settled down to a boisterous social life. A towarysz rarely mixed with his own retainers and servants; rather he kept company with other towarysze and his rotmistrz and, to the amazement of foreigners, he often dined at the hetman's table. Such gatherings were inevitably lubricated by alcohol. Vodka, being easy to transport or to distil with rudimentary apparatus, became the drink of the military, and husars, like the 'idle rich' of every age, were notorious for their drinking. The satirist and soldier Waclaw Potocki (1621–96) describes a Frenchman entering a Polish bar to see a filthy-drunk husser towarysz 'vomiting bigos (cabbage stew) onto a table from his mouth and nose ... 'This is not like Paris', huffs the Frenchman. 'Welcome to Poland', comments Potocki.

All too often drinking binges left troops and commanders incapacitated in their tents, bringing campaigning to a halt. Better commanders would be able to enforce discipline in the camp, filling vacant time with training and religious devotions.

The towarysz, as a gentleman, was excused most of the menial duties of camp life. Some of these fell on his pachsikis, unfortunately shadowy figures who rarely wrote diaries. The many criminal cases that resulted from the passing of almost every Polish army suggest they were often up to no good, drinking like the towarysze, and then getting into vicious fights.

Below the pachsikis were the camp servants — the dogsbodies of the unit. A good idea of the lot of a servant is seen in Piotr Baryka's 1657 poem Z chlopą król (A peasant made king):

You're never free day or night:
In the morning it's harness my horse, brush my coat.
If don't please him, he thumps you.
Then it's muck out the stables.
And as for eating — Dear God, what could be worse?
You watch like a puppy for something to drip from his mustache. ...
Indeed, dogs often eat better than husar servants ...
And when they get drunk, oh, pity the poor servant ... It's jump over this barred sword, or hold up this coin, which he then shoots from your fingers.

Army regulations required some towaryszes always to be present in camp to maintain order among the servants. Such duties were performed in rotation, so that all towarysze gradually acquired command experience. Each company was responsible for its own fodder, and obtaining this was a key chore of the servants, who would leave camp to exercise and water the horses and take the opportunity to scour the neighbouring countryside ruthlessly for anything edible.

More aggressive foraging missions were delegated to the pachsikis supervised by a handful of towaryszes. For these, the cavalry left behind the wagons and heavier equipment — often including the husars' lances — and travelled in komunik (from Ruthenian komon 'horse') — meaning with only what their horses could carry. The memoirist Samuel Maskiewicz (pp. 124–5) describes one such raid during the Smolensk campaign of 1610. In all 1,800 pachsikis were drawn out from the army,
and attached to them ‘to ensure better discipline were two towarzysze from each company’. This ad hoc force not only found food, but also captured and thoroughly looted the Russian town of Rostov, 110km south-east of Smolensk.

Siege warfare, involving long months holed up in camp, rather than sweeping charges, was the reality of most campaign life. Hussars were not expected to do manual labour, but would often stand mounted in formation and under fire to provide cover while infantry and dragoons dug entrenchments. When defending a tabor or wagon-fort, the infantry and camp servants would be left to hold the perimeter, while the hussars were preserved as a mounted reserve, ready to sally out if the attackers slipped their guard.

In protracted sieges, the hussar pacholiks took their turn manning the ramparts, and often participated in storming operations, with one or two towarzysze to command them. The participation of towarzysze in such dangerous operations was entirely voluntary. Nevertheless, large numbers of towarzysze often took part, as at Pskov (1581) and Pernau (1609). At Smolensk in August 1610, however, they initially refused to assist in a storming operation, because they had been ordered to the task, rather than requested to it.

With the increasing use of field works in warfare against the Swedes and Turks, and of wooden field obstacles by the Russians, even field battles often resembled sieges. At Ląkow in 1649, the hussar towarzysze dismounted to lead the final victorious assault against the Ukrainian Cossack wagon-fort.
The evolution of hussar wings

Hussar towarzysz, c.1680s

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  
6.  
7.  
8.  
9.  
10.  
11.  

[Detailed illustrations of hussar armor and uniforms with numbers indicating each element or style evolution.]
The universal soldier?

Starowolski (1648) liked to think of the hussar as the universal soldier: 'When necessary, he cast aside the lance to become a Reiter (German-style horseman) with gun and pallasche; taking off his armour he became a kozak horseman; and if the king or hetman only asked it, he was an infantryman in armour.' This is all stirring rhetoric, as we would expect of a patriotic cleric, but how much truth is there in it?

One of the chief criticisms of hussars cited by contemporaries was that they were of little use for anything but pitched battles. They could not be employed on everyday campaign duties as the condition of their horses would quickly deteriorate. Maurice de Saxe became a great fan of the heavy lancer after extensive service in Poland in the 1710s. On Polish-style lancers he later wrote: 'one should regard them like the heavy artillery, which ... for most of the time is little more than a burden on the baggage train.'

Another admirer of the Polish hussar was General-Major J.J. Kampenhansen (c.1680–1742), a Baltic German who served widely in the Great Northern War. In his Chwała i Apologia Kozji i Pik (Praise and apology for the lance and pike), Kalisz 1737, he answered criticism of the lancer: 'The Poles have a saying – cheap meat is eaten by dogs.' Lancers may be expensive he says, but you get what you pay for. 'Good for only one day of battle!' Kampenhansen continues, 'Yes, but what a day – the day of decision!'

**BATTLE FORMATIONS**

Throughout the 16th century the main tactical formation of Polish cavalry was the huf (from Middle High German Hufe, modern German Haufen, 'battle-formation'). This was made up of several companies, grouped apparently as a single contiguous body. The huf was the chief operating block of the 'Old Polish battle-array' (see diagram on p.45). It could number from 150 to 1,500 horses, depending on its place in the battle order.

By western standards these formations were quite shallow – Hetman Florian Zebrzydowski, in his Military Articles of 1561, thought that even for the larger huf 'there is no need to form more than four ranks [deep].'

However, since he wished to have only towarzysze in the front rank, each of whom at this date had five or more pacholks, formations were somewhat deeper in practice. During the 1538 Russian campaign some formations were drawn up four deep, others five, while the king ordered the hussars of the Court Army under their hetman, Zborowski, to be drawn up only three deep; Zborowski himself commented that this was because they were 'older' (i.e. more experienced) troops (WZ, p. 97).

The larger huf were cumbersome bodies, and in c.1545 Stanislaw Laski (a veteran of French and Hungarian service, who had fought at
Thinner formations were adopted as the average hussar _poczet_ declined in size: three deep was the norm by the 1620s. Dupont suggests two deep already at Vienna, but Dalécar and other sources indicate many units were still forming three deep. After 1700 (when Dupont was writing) formations were indeed two deep, and better-armed retainers were brought into the front rank to fight alongside the _towarzezy_. This must have annoyed the proud _towarzezy_ greatly – Karw Nick notes in 1710 that they regarded it a ‘dishonour’ even to stand in the same formation with their retainers.

In battle, the best of the camp servants were formed up a few hundred paces to the rear of the main battle order, with a small flag (znacze) for each formation. Shrewd commanders – such as Chodkievicz at Kircholm – used them to imitate reinforcements, but their main duty was to feed forward spare lances (when available) and fresh horses to the parent formation, and to care for the wounded. In difficult battles such as Batsia/Basheya River (1666), they did sometimes fight.

**THE EXPERIENCE OF BATTLE**

The hours before battle were a time for solemn reflection, which began in camp with Holy Mass. Although most Poles were Christians, pagan pre-battle superstitions remained popular: Pasek mentions soldiers ‘seasoning their swords and bullets by rubbing with various holy things’. During fast-moving operations when there was no time for Mass, as at Polonaka against the Russians in 1666, Pasek comments: ‘While marching everyone conducted his own private service – singing, reciting prayers; our chaplains on horseback riding to hear confessions; everyone prepared himself to be as ready as possible for death.’ Once in their battle formations soldiers were strictly forbidden from leaving them. The advance to combat usually began after the army had sung the traditional battle hymn (known since the 13th century): _Bogurodzica_ (Mother of God).

The early phase of a battle was one of manoeuvre for advantage. The ‘Old Polish battle-array’ was designed for this, the hetman feeling around

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<tr>
<th>left</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lewy rog (left wing)</td>
<td>Czolo (head) or Huf czelny (Lead huf)</td>
<td>Prawy rog (right wing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Posilek (support)</td>
<td>Czal (rear) or Huf walny (Main huf)</td>
<td>Posilek (support)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Posilek (support)</td>
<td>last reserve</td>
<td>Posilek (support)</td>
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LEFT The ‘Old Polish battle-array’ was the standard deployment used until the 1620s. All illustrations of it are idealized: actual arrangements depended on troops available and terrain. The two central blocks – each up to 1,500 strong – contained the best-equipped horsemen, with the Huf walny (German: Gewalthaufen) intended for delivering the decisive blow. The wing and support huf were usually 150-300 strong. A ‘last reserve’ – variously named in the sources – was kept unengaged to extract the army if the action went badly.
as not to arrive tired and without vigour; furthermore, the shorter the gallop, the better united will be the troop’.

A theory has developed in recent years that husars conducted half the charge in loose formation, and closed up knee-to-knee just before the final spurt, so minimizing missile casualties and allowing the charge to be aborted at the last moment. This theory, apparently introduced by the historian J. Teodorczyk in 1966, flies in the face of all western cavalry doctrine. Western writers insist that the entire charge be conducted in tight order, as cavalry formations tend to spread out when horses gallop, with braver riders dashes ahead, and cautious or poorly mounted men falling behind.

A clear description of actual Polish practice appears in a ‘Hetman’s Ordinance’ of c.1704, probably issued by Crown Grand Hetman Hieronim Lubomirski. Here it is stated that the formation manoeuvres in loose order, but before a charge is initiated the roisnitrz shouts the following series of orders:

Usiszcie sie – Silence!
Nasznajcie czapki – Secure your hats! [this applied to ‘men without metal helmets, for it is odious and inconvenient to lose one’s hat in action’]
Scisnijcie kolano z kolanem – Close up knee-to-knee!
Szcblate na temblaki – Sabres on sword-knobs!
[... or for those without lances]
Szczele w rek – Draw sabres!

On the order Dalsy – March on! – the formation was to advance at a gentle trot until about half way to the enemy, at which point came the final instruction:

Zlaye kopie – Lower your lances!

The lance was lowered alongside the horse’s head, and the unit charged, now at full gallop, to contact the enemy. These instructions indicate unambiguously that the tightening of formation occurred not during the charge, but before it began. The idea that husars could alter formation even during a charge is clearly a myth.

Interestingly, the same hetman’s ordinance indicates that sabres dangled during the charge from a sword-knot, even when the rider was holding his lance. Hussars also kept their lances rested in a supporting boot or sleeve, known by the Hungarian term tok. Western lancers removed their lances from this before the charge, resting the lance-butt on the saddle until it was lowered shortly before contact. Polish hussars appear to have kept theirs in the tok even at impact. This is clear in Rakowski’s Poludka zaznym synom (Rzewski to worthy sons) of 1620, where there are also additional instructions for the charging hussar:

The tok should by strapped to the saddle, on the right side; while the lance in true hussar style, should be in its tok. Don’t twist to your left, but sit bolt upright ... Over the horse’s neck lower your lance; charge forward, stroking the flying beast beneath you with the spur, and aim at the enemy’s navel.

the enemy flanks with the flank huf, or concentrating the ‘support’ hufi on one wing to reinforce an attack. Such concentrations were often achieved behind the cover of a skirmish screen.

Manoeuvre was performed in open order. Various ‘hetman’s articles’ – standing orders issued by a commander – indicate that spacings between horses should be loose enough to allow units to turn 90 and 180 degrees on the spot, and Sarnicki mentions the main cavalry hufi turned around at Obertyn (1531) using the Laconian (Spartan) counter-march. Western writers indicate that filling ground per mount was enough to achieve such formation changes.

Attacks, when they came, would be rapid and aggressive, giving the enemy no time to recover balance. They were often paved by close fire-support from haiduk infantry (fied around the field on nags or double-mounted behind husars at Lubieszów, 1577) and later by dragoons on their own horses (as at Warka, 1606, where a Swedish mounted force was defeated by the dragoon-hussar combination alone). Cavalry of the pancerny-korak type also helped ‘shoot in’ hussar charges with their long-barrelled firearms, employing a variant of the caracole of western harquebusiers, and absorbing some of the enemy fire in the process.

The charge

Lancers began their charge at about 100 paces from the enemy, and according to the famous general Montecuccoli (Sulle battaglia, p. 146) ‘at 50 paces they run at full bridle in order to deliver their thrust’. Giorgio Basta – who had extensive experience of East European heavy husars – wrote in his 1612 manual that lancers should ‘commence their fire reit in 80 paces’ ... ‘60 paces is as much as the horse can endure so
Before closing with most opponents the hussars would have to endure at least one volley of enemy fire. Its effects are described at Kokkenhusen (1601) by the Swedish commander Carl Gyllenhielm, who was on the receiving end of a hussar charge. He relates how the fire from the arquebuses and carbines of the Swedish cavalry seemed to have great effect:

Both man and horse with their lances and kopias tumbling head-over-heels to the ground. Nevertheless, those who remained uninjured and still mounted, continued on through the dust ... and put our left wing to flight.

The moment of impact of lancers must have been terrifying for those on the receiving end. The sight of a few colleagues impaled on lances was often enough to shatter enemy morale. The historian Wespzan Kochowski, in his Song of Vienna liberated (1684), describes the charge at Vienna (which he witnessed) in the following terms:

No sooner does a hussar lower his lance
Than a Turk is impaled on its spike,
Which not only disorders, but terrifies the foe.
That blow which cannot be defended against or deflected ...
Oft transfixing two persons at a time,
Others flee in eager haste from such a sight,
Like flies in a frenzy.

Modern Polish historians have accepted such quotes at face value, even though they are usually poetic; westerners have long been more sceptical about the lance’s efficacy in battle. François de La Noue (p. 201), who commanded a lancer company in France during the 1570s, considered the lance charge as more bravo than effect: for at the onset [impact] it killeth none. Yea, it is a miracle if any be slayne with the spiere [i.e. lance]: onely it may wound some horse.’

Against an enemy in plate armour the lance was not deadly, even in Poland. After the battle of Dirschau in August 1627, the Danzig secretary Johann Chemnitz reported ‘the [Hussar] lances were able to do little against the [Swedish] breastplates, whereas so many of them broke that they [the Poles] were encumbered by wood when they needed to come away again’ (State Archive Gdańsk, 300, IX, N:67). The Swedish colonel Claes Dietrich received his noble name ‘Sperreuter’ (Lancer) after an action in 1627 in which no fewer than three hussar lances broke against his armour.

Being hollowed to reduce weight, the kopia was even less effective than the heavy western lance and was expected to break on impact; the Polish term is krucze, ‘shatter or crumble’, which alone indicates the weapon’s fragility. Western authorities on tournaments even ridiculed the ‘empty vaunting with hollow staves’, which were of little danger to opponents.

The lance was a more efficient killer against less well-armoured Turkish and Russian horsemen and against their horses, and western writers stress the target of the lance in combat should be the enemy horse. Polish sources often state the rider as the target; whether this was from love of horses or from a reluctance to kill valuable loot is unclear.

The hussar lance is perhaps best understood as a psychological weapon. It was not expected to kill or maim large numbers of the enemy, but rather to destroy their morale. Conditioned as we are by Hollywood depictions of battle as mass duels, it is easy to forget that the primary aim of combat in this period was to break up enemy formations, converting a mutually supporting block of soldiers into a flock of frightened individuals who can easily be slaughtered. Montecuccoli, who commanded an Austrian corps in Poland in 1658 (Sulle Battaglie, p. 147), states this clearly: ‘Horsed troops cannot be routed unless they are smashed open in a vigorous manner.’ Montecuccoli believed that lancers were the best possible weapon for this task, though he thought they needed to be armoured from head to toe, and on good horses, and the attack needed to be followed up by cuirassiers to complete the job.

Polish hussars fit the bill perfectly, and the ‘follow-through’ was performed by further bodies of hussars, who were as well armoured as most Thirty Years War cuirassiers. In later years, as hussars grew scarcer, the ‘follow-through’ was delegated to pancerzaksiak horse, who may not have packed the same punch as cuirassiers, but were quicker at chasing down a beaten opponent.

Close combat
Let us assume, however, that the first hussar charge has failed to ‘smash open’ the enemy. Hussars who had broken their lances would reach for a secondary weapon. Indeed, with the enemy upon them, front rankers with
unbroken lances would have little option but to drop their lances as well. It was not the koncerz nor the pallassh to which they turned first: in the few frantic seconds that constituted cavalry combat in this period, it took too long to draw from its scabbard on the saddle.

Some might reach for pistols, though De La Noue (p. 291) considered the single pistol carried by lancers in his day as ineffective — often misfiring since the rider was too preoccupied with his lance to attend to the temperamental mechanism. Others might grasp a warhammer: these were excellent for piercing helmets and armour, although Malatesta (1610), a particular fan of Polish warhammers, thought they were best reserved for pistols, though De La Noue notes ‘the Reisters are never so dauntless as when they bee mingled with the enemy, for then be they all fire.’ It was preferable to withdraw for another charge while some lances were still intact. A few sabre slashes, and the ‘contact’ was quickly over.

Tactics were planned with multiple charges in mind. Not all companies charged at the same time; some remained stationary at the rear awaiting the outcome of the first ‘wave.’ A hussar company that had failed to break its opponents returned to its lines through intervals left by supporting units. These intervals, notes the 1704 Hetman’s Ordinance, were to be at least as wide as the formation itself.

Sheltering behind its supports, our hussar company now caught breath, reordered ranks and prepared for the next charge. The unbroken lances were passed forward to the front rank. Sobieski, in a letter to his wife, relates how at the second battle of Parnicky in October 1685 he ordered those hussars still with lances to move forward to the front rank. A commotion ensued, in which a pachołek rode in front of his master and complained loudly: ‘Your honour, I brought the lance out of battle for myself, I didn’t throw it down like other hussars.’ Greatly amused, Sobieski gave the wily trooper five gold dukats.

Those without lances now unsheathed their koncerz or pallassh from beneath the saddle; indeed Pasek (in his description of the Bещхеба River Battle, 1660) indicates that this was the regulation: ‘Anyone who had broken his lance was to take to the pallassh, such was the standing order.’ The koncerz could be used as a pseudo-lance, its great length and evil point unpicking the enemy, threatening to skewer even those skulking on the ground out of sabre-reach, but it was less useful in a mêlée. As anyone who has held a koncerz will testify, the weapon is blade-heavy, making parrying with it awkward. The pallassh — the equivalent of the western cavalry broadsword — was far more popular. Being designed for the thrust, it could be employed in lighter formations than the sabre. In battle descriptions where hussars have already broken their lances, it is usually with a pallassh as their main weapon: ‘Soon after breaking our kopie on them, again we attacked Moscow with our pallasshes.’ (The soldier-poet Andrzej Rymsz describing an action in 1580.)

The battle continued, with a wavelike effect, companies charging, retreating, re-forming and then charging again, until one side finally gave

way. At Klushino (1610) Maskiewicz, a towarzys with one of the most heavily engaged hussar units, wrote: ‘it may be hard to believe, but some companies came to contact and fought with the enemy eight or ten times.’ This was clearly atypical. Nevertheless, at Górzno (1629) a short, unsuccessful engagement, Swedish witnesses record that some hussar companies managed to charge three or four times.

Hussars versus pikemen

Hussars, like all good-quality cavalry, could easily overrun infantry formations in the open if they were unprotected by pikes. However, the idea has grown over the last few decades that even pikes were insufficient to protect infantry from the long lances of the hussars. This has been set firmly in the popular imagination by Hoffman’s film The Deluge, where hussars (un-historically) ride down Swedish pikemen in 1656.

First, there is the idea that hussar lances were lengthened specifically to outreach pikes. This is far from proven. Until the end of the Swedish War in 1629, Polish lances (about 5m long) appear to have been shorter than Swedish pikes, which had a regulation length of 5.98m, reduced in 1616 to 5.3m. Indeed, it is only later in the century that writers like Cefali (1660s), Fredro (1670) and Daléké (1690s) commented that the kopie was ‘longer than our infantry pikes’. But this was because the pikes had shrunk by this date to a more manageable 14-160 (4.2-4.8m). Even if this were not the case, what advantage was an extra foot or two of lance when a split second later the horse’s momentum impaled it on the dense hedge of pikes?

In fact the few successes of hussars against pikemen occurred before 1688. There are far fewer records of pikemen for the next century than the lances, and the hussars rarely achieved victory unassisted. For example, at Lubieszów (1577) during the Danzig Rebellion, 3,000 German landsknechts were routed by hussars, but only after they had been engaged frontally by 600 Hungarian hatalk infantry of the royal guard. Nor were other famous victories such as Pitschen (1588) and Klushino (1610) achieved by direct charges of hussars against steady pikemen.

The single exception is Kircholm (1605), where about 3,500 Lithuanians managed to trounce a Swedish army of nearly 11,000. But these were not the immaculately trained troops of Gustavus Adolphus. The native Swedish infantry were virtually unmoulded, still reluctant to ‘trail’ the pike and poorly trained in its use.1 However, that the hussars did indeed charge pikemen at Kircholm is recorded, for example, in the broadsheet Nowoż 1 Infant (News from Livonia), written soon after the battle: ‘They [the hussars] fell on the pikemen, since it could not be otherwise, and broke through the enemy, though not without damage to themselves.’ Kircholm was an astounding tribute to Polish arms. Even the Poles recognized its uniqueness. Jakub Semkiewicz, father of the future king, later wrote: ‘In future centuries the victory will be marvelled at, rather than actually believed.’ But it would be quite wrong to generalize from a single battle that the Polish lance was a super-weapon never seen anywhere else in the history of warfare, which allowed hussars to break pikemen as a matter of routine.

Pursuit
Wars in Eastern Europe have long been brutal affairs; those in 17th-century Poland were little different. Polish armies were usually outnumbered, and commanders understood the need to reduce enemy manpower at every opportunity. Hetman Florian Zborowski’s Military Articles of 1561 state that during battle cavalry were not to take prisoners unless they looked important. The leading pursuers were to inflict disabling wounds on the enemy and not to trouble with killing them, but to ride on looking for more enemy. The wounded would be dispatched by camp servants following behind.

After Lubieszów (1577) half the 8,000 Danzig citizen militia who had done little more than stand by as spectators during the action were butchered during their rout – arousing bitterness in the Polish Commonwealth’s largest city for decades to come. After Kircholm at least half and perhaps as much as two-thirds of the Swedish army were killed during the retreat – more than two Swedes for every Pole at the battle.

The loot-hungry pacholiki and camp servants were especially feared by the enemy. At Bassewa River (1660) Pasek was mistaken for a retainer by a Russian boyar who was attempting to surrender:

I looked untrustworthy, being dressed in a grey kontus; he distrusts me, thinking me a pacholik, worthless ruddle, the sort which are most feared: they say you never find generosity in such people (as he himself later related). But in the distance he saw a towarzysz, one of ours, but dressed in red in a tatty old crimson kontus... he supposed this was a person of note and rode straight to him [to offer his surrender].

Even so, if Russian nobles survived capture they could be exceptionally well treated. Polish diaries are full of accounts of merry drink-filled evenings shared with Russian prisoners, and of friendships springing up that both parties promised to maintain when the conflict was over.

Casualties
After the battle of Khushino, Maskiewicz records the fate of the Polish dead and wounded as follows: ‘The hetman ordered all our casualties collected into a heap and the more prominent ones, like the towarzysz, he had taken with him, the rest were buried. The wounded and shot towarzysz he had placed in his own carriage or carried on a stretcher between two horses.’

Hussar towarzysz, seldom having surgeons on their company strength, generally received care of the hetman’s personal physician, often a foreigner or a Pole who had studied medicine abroad. Their retainers had to make do with whatever traditional remedies the camp servants could concoct. Badly wounded husssars also received far higher compensation than other troops – in 1649 after the epic siege of Zbaraz, they were given 250 złoty, compared to 90 for janierzy-kozaks and only 30 for infantrymen.

Casualty statistics for many Polish victories. Dead and wounded towarzysze are often mentioned by name along with the numbers of horses each company lost and even types of wounds the men suffered. It was rare for a 100-horse hussar company to lose more than four towarzysze and eight retainers killed or wounded. Horse losses were approximately double those of the men. Generally speaking, casualties from firearms greatly outnumbered those from cold-steel weapons.

However, it is dangerous to generalize from these figures that husssars were relatively invulnerable. Acts of unit heroism often resulted in more extreme casualties. During the victory over the Russians at Sroklow in 1654 Janusz Radziwill’s hussar company is reported to have lost more than half of its strength in an exhausting five-hour action. At Vienna in 1683, Prince Alexander Sobieski’s company lost 19 towarzysze and 36 retainers of its 120–130 actual men during its charge to test the ground prior to the main assault (see Plate G). The often crippling casualties from Polish defeats are less well recorded.

AFTER BATTLE
Most campaigns drew to a close in late autumn, as the first snows began to fall. With their wagons empty, horses lacking fodder and ill-nourished troops suffering illness, few armies would remain useful in the field over winter. If no action was expected the following spring and funds were available to pay troops off, companies were generally disbanded. This was not the end of them. The next campaign was seldom a year or more away, and a rotmistr would receive a fresh recruitment letter from the
king and revive his unit from a dormant state — largely with the same men — to serve in another campaign.

After the army reforms of 1652, companies began to have a more permanent existence, aided by the almost permanent state of war that had engulfed Poland. In the early years of peace companies were reduced to 60–80 horses rather than being disbanded, while the hussars maintained units of 100 or more. Many companies endured for decades, developing strong corporate identities. Companies shared the fortunes of their patrons. Aleksander Skorobohaty (1639–99) served for ten years in various panerni units before joining the huscarl company of Lithuanian Grand Hetman Hetman Jan Kazimierz Pac, who in 1667 was promoted to Grand Hetman. After Pac died in 1682 the company was taken over by Jan Sobieski, becoming his royal huscarl company of the Lithuanian army. Skorobohaty now found himself in the highest-status company in the land.

Demotions in unit status also occurred when a rotmistrz died. If a wealthy patron could not be found to take over the company quickly, the company often broke up. There was nothing to prevent a zazwycznij from enlisting with a different rotmistrz; such transfers were possible after the completion of every quarter year of service. Ambitious individuals switched regularly between units, starting in panerni-huzar cavalry and gradually working their way up to a high-status unit of hussars, the pinnacle of ambition being to serve in the king’s own huscarl company — under the eyes, and hopefully favours of, the monarch.

Retirement

For many hussars their military service was merely a rite of passage, a short interlude in their life as noblemen. It won them the respect of peers and the clubbish camaraderie of a noble class who still referred to themselves as ‘knights’. A professional career might last considerably longer, and several dliaists write of their retirement after 20 years of field service. Skorobohaty served no fewer than 37 years, retiring at the age of 52 in 1691, though after 1684 he no longer went on campaign, having left his pociet in the charge of his retainers.

The Seym committed itself in 1607 to reward soldiers who had served six years (1V 2, 1629). In practice huskar towarzysze were often granted the semi-hereditary post of wojt or headman of a village or small town, which gave considerable status and power. This post was ideally suited to the incidental skills learned on campaign — belligerence with civil and military officials.

over quarters and pay arrears. Many retired hussars went on to careers in national government. In times of major crisis, when the Popolite Huszarne (noble levy) was called out, former hussars were brought out of retirement to command levy units.

As Poland’s financial situation deteriorated in the later 17th century, service rewards were cut back or granted mostly to members of royal units. The huscarl Poczoobut-Odlanicki was disbanded in October 1671 after over 12 years of service. Having taken part in many parades himself he was distressed that his ‘de-mobbing’ took place without any ceremony. He had been promised the post of wojt, but the civil offices went only to the officers of his unit. Although many retired hussars bemoaned the lack of financial rewards, most merely lamented the many horses they had lost on campaign, and wrote about them at length in their memoirs composed in their autumn years.

The hussars had evolved a unique funerary ritual as a fitting farewell to former companions and commanders. At the culmination of the funeral service a fully armoured hussar representing the deceased rode full tilt into the church and splintered his lance against the altar. By the 18th century hussars rarely set forth on campaign and the only time the public ever saw these ‘funeral soldiers’, as Kitowicz called them, was in such ceremonies.

DEMISE OF THE HUSSARS

By 1600 the heavy lancer was obsolete in western Europe. Only a few companies remained in service as generals’ honour guards into the 1630s. With its flat plains and vast distances Poland was more suited to lancers than many other states, but the end of the golden age of the hussar was not long in coming.

Above all it was the massive firepower of the reform troops of Gustavus Adolphus that put an end to the hussar’s ascendency. The first sign of problems came at Miati in Latvia in August 1622 where, facing a wall of fire from Swedish field guns and musketeers, the hussars flatly refused to charge. The Lithuanian hetman Krzysztof Radziwill wrote: ‘I rode from one cavalry unit to the next … said I would lead them myself, threatened them with the gallows, promised them rewards, but nothing helped.’ (K. Radziwill, Sprawy wojenne i polityczne, p. 282). Similar scenes were repeated at Gniew (1626) in Polish Prussia.

Even the pistol-armed Swedish cavalry were no longer a pushover, and after Dirschau in 1627, Chemnitz commented that the relative ineffectiveness of the Polish lancers in the battle will ‘fortunately give them cause to rearm in the Netherlandish manner, with arquebuses and good pistols’. During the ‘Deluge’ of 1655–58 the hussars avoided frontal assaults on the Swedes, with their tightly intersecting fields of fire from muskets and quick-firing artillery. The partly successful hussar charge at Warsaw (1656) was directed against a
Swedish cavalry wing, but that too was repulsed with the help of infantry and artillery fire.

The hussars were becoming anachronism when fighting westernized armies such as the Swedes, but until the end of the 17th century they continued to be of value against eastern opponents such as the Russians and the Turks. However, their direct cost to the state was far higher than their paltry salary, which increasingly was not being paid. On a costly stead that took three months or more to train, employing an expensive lance that could be used only once, and with a vast staff of servants who clogged up roads and camps, consuming the limited supplies of food and fodder, they were hardly an effective use of scarce resources.

The gradual demoralization of Polish society from the 1650s, which spilled over into the army, was just as much of a problem. A 100-horse company of hussars represented 30–40 towarzysze – each in effect an officer with his own opinion, which he voiced at every opportunity. Any system in which these argumentative gentlemen dined with their commanders as equals was hardly conducive to military discipline. They could ignore orders from officers of western-style formations (whom they regarded as riff-raff), and had to be convinced by their own commanders to charge rather than to order it so.

In their heyday the hussars had won some of history’s most decisive victories. Their visual splendour, whether their wings were saddle-mounted or back-mounted, made a dazzling impression on all who saw them. The Polish hussars were certainly among the finest cavalry of their day, but the words of Sobieski’s one-time doctor, Bernard Connor (Ch. VI, p. 9), are perhaps a more accurate epitaph: ‘These [hussars], were they but better Disciplin’d and better paid, would perhaps be the finest Cavalry in the World.’

Finally, in 1775, the Seym abolished the hussars. Those men still fit for service were reorganized into new brigades of unarmoured ‘National Cavalry’ (Kawaleria Narodowa). The future now belonged to more plebeian formations that were cheaper to equip and better able to replace casualties. Chief among these were the Uhlans, which had evolved out of Tatar cavalry in Polish service. In this more mobile guise – and equipped with a lighter lance – the Polish lancer was again to make his mark across the battlefields of Europe.

**COLLECTING**

Hussar weaponry and armour rarely appears on the open market; most that does is either fake or not Polish. Genuine pieces invariably reach the attention of Polish dealers and can fetch extraordinary sums. Far more plentiful and affordable are arms and armour in Polish or Hungarian style, most of which were made in western Europe.

Buyers should be wary of modern modifications – such as Polish ‘wings’ welded on to otherwise mundane German Pappenheimer

LEFT: Helms with attached metal winglets are a puzzle. They first appear in art of the 1730s when Poland was ruled by a Saxon king, and are worn only by Saxon cavalrymen – as a ‘practical’ alternative to the Polish back-mounted wing. Poles favoured elaborate burnished steel helments, yet most surviving winged helments are obsolete bugentos or (as here) mass-produced ‘Pappenheimers’ to which the winglets have been added. It may be a patriotic thought-crime to point this out, but there is actually little evidence that winged helments are Polish rather than Saxon. (Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London)
hats. Any wings attached to armour suits are almost certain to be modern replicas. Karaencic scale armour and budkugyn maces make occasional appearances at auctions, but for most collectors ambitions should be limited to western-made helmets, war-hammers (which were widely used throughout central and eastern Europe), and 18th-century Polish or Hungarian sabres.

ENTERTAINMENT AND RE-ENACTMENT

For those wishing to sample the flavour of the period, an excellent starting point is the trilogy of novels on Poland's 17th-century wars by Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916). These have been translated into English and were also made into films: Colonel Wodzijawski/Fire on the Steppe (1968), The Deluge (1974), and With Fire & Sword (1998).

At the time of writing, re-enactment is still in its early days – hampered by the high cost of hussar equipment. In the USA the most active groups operate under the umbrella of the Sienkiewicz Society, in particular Boleślaw Orlicki's light artillery and its affiliated bodies Czarnecki's division in CT/ NY and Butler's dragoons in TX/ AR (traceable with any internet search engine). A useful clearing house for information is Zagloga's Tavern: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/zaglobastavern

In Poland re-enactment is concentrated on the medieval period, with the stress on fun rather than historical accuracy. Seventeenth-century groups keen on authenticity include the Liga Baronów (League of Barons): www.ligabarowanow.pw.pl and Winiwarter's company of pancerni: http://choragiewpancerna.pw.pl. A Polish board for re-enactors can be found at www.freha.pl

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VL = Wolumina Logan, I– IX, Petersburg 1859–60
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\[LEFT\] A rare realistic depiction of an early armoured hussar, from the tombstone of Piotr Strzeila, a Moravian who died in 1606. The inscription (in Czech) states he died aged 40 ‘in the Polish Crown’, suggesting he had served in Poland. His equipment, which unusually for Polish funerary sculpture shows little stylization, includes a fully articulated ‘lobster’ breastplate, mail sleeves and skirt, and a warhammer. See plate A for a reconstruction. (St Bartholomew’s Church, Sucha, near Strzelce Opolskie, Poland)

without the characteristic brass decorations. His breastplate is of ‘full lobster’ or ‘animal’ style, reconstructed from a similar example in the National Museum, Bulgaria. A type of breastplate with a high gorget \[2\] appears to have been more common; this example is taken from a large batch of such armours made in Styria in the 1590s and surviving to this day in the Graz Armoury in Austria. Note the leather lining, which is partly original. An alternative form of helmet of similar date \[3\] is also from Graz, with the leather lining \[3a\] reconstructed from another surviving helmet.

Though this hussar wears a mail shirt under his armour, the requirement was only for mail sleeves. Written sources sometimes mention ‘zarekawie z kosztalem’ – mail sleeves attached to an arming garment \[4\], which we reconstruct from a hussar in a Roerant Savery painting of c.1665 and mail sleeves from Graz.

The various types of war-hammer \[5\] were known at first indistinguishably as a czekan (from Hungarian cizkán). Only towards 1700 did the term naciak (from Turkish naciq) come into use to describe the variant with a hammer-head and an extended beak carried by our central figure.

Combat sabres \[6\] were still of open-hilted Hungarian style, but had lost the heavy blades of Hungarian weapons. Increasingly, a chainnet was added to protect the knuckle. The scabbard was of wood lined with black leather, and hung from a waist belt on two (sometime four) rings \[7\], which were adjustable with the help of slider fittings \[7a\]. On campaign, sabres were fitted with a sword-knot (lemb) \[8\], here taken from a portrait.

Tall and short varieties of Hungarian moroccan leather boots \[9\] were fashionable among hussars; both had horn-shape-shaped hollow metal heels. Combat spurs were now of simple Western form; long spurs \[10\] were reserved mostly for parades.

B: COMPANY OF COURTiers (CHORAGiEW DWORZASKA), 1605

At the heart of the royal guard was a hussar formation raised from minor state functionaries and courtiers (dворяне), each of whom equipped a ‘courtier retinue’ of four to 24 hussars. The combined unit has for decades been misnamed as the ‘royal hussar company’; its correct name is the ‘Company of Courtiers’ (Choragiw Dworza). This is the main hussar unit depicted on the Stockholm roll (see page 60).

In the regular army each hussar company used a single design of pennant. The Courtier Company was different, with each courtier retinue having its own pennant and lance design in an elaborate range of patterns; all 12 designs shown on the
roll are reconstructed here for the first time. Each courrier retains its own style of cape or leopardskin and helmet decoration (with varying numbers/types of plumes, presence/ absence of a spike or gilded). The Hussar towarzysz [1] with star-splashed panther skin is taken from row 4 front of the Stockholm Roll (for the arrangement of retinues on the roll, see the illustration opposite). His szyszak helmet is of an early form with an adjustable visor but no nasal, and appears to be a bulk piece for the whole company.

All retinues wear mail shirts below their breastplates (or mail sleeves and separate mail skirts), but no armguards or gauntlets. Each hussar has two swords—a saber and a pallasz broadsword—the scabbard decorations not always matching. The extra-long kornez sword is consequently absent. Wings are of frame variety, worn simply on the left side of the saddle only. There are no clear images of the saddle attachment; we reconstruct a possible method.

The opposite schematics show courier retinues with wimpel capes. They are [2] from row 6 front, [3] row 5 below. The Hussar Company of Courriers (chorapie dworzański) from the 'Stockholm Roll'—so-called because it spent several centuries in Sweden after being looted in Warsaw in 1655-56. The 15m-long roll depicts the parade held in Krakow for the wedding of Zygmunt III Waza and the Habsburg princess Constance in December 1606. Accounts of the event record that the company numbered 200-300 hussars, but give only generalized descriptions of the unit's appearance. Only rows 1-5 of the seven depicted are shown here. (Royal Castle, Warsaw)

B: COMPANY OF COURTIERS (CONTINUED)
The figures in this plate all represent courier retinues wearing leopardskins. [1] is taken from row 7 front of the Stockholm Roll. He is one of the few figures in the Courtier Company wearing a 'half-lobster' breastplate with just three or four lames at the waist (reconstructed from an example in the Graz Armoury dated 1595). Most of the company wear the older "full-lobster" breastplates (see Plate A). Both styles have tall gorgets covering much of the neck.

The spikes shown on the helmets on the roll are a mystery, as nothing similar survives. Possibly the artist, an Austrian court painter, mistook hussar nasals for spikes—a theory we explore here. The saddle and horse harness are restored from the tournament gear of Archduke Ferdinand II, of c.1550 (Wolfsenammlung, Vienna). Stirrups are of paddle- shaped Tatar style.


D: A HUSSAR POCKET IN CAMP, 1620s/30s
The smallest economic unit of the hussars was the poczet (retinue). By the mid-17th century, this typically comprised a towarzysz (companion), two retainers/pacholicks, who formed back, [4] row 3, and [5] row 7 back. The penants marked with an asterisk are partly hidden on the original, and our reconstructions, although sometimes speculative, are based on all possible clues, including pennant length and shape.

The Hussar's wing seems to have evolved from wing devices seen in Italian and South German heraldry since the 14th century. In the early 16th century, painted wings or winged claws began to appear on the asymmetric cavalry shield favoured in the Balkans [1].

Soon, Serbian and Bosnian daili horsemen in Ottoman service began to attach feathers to their shields in place of these painted wings [2]. This dail, in his characteristic leopard, bear and wolfskin clothing, is based on western and Ottoman sources from 1530-90. The wing pinned to his shield is not a whole bird's wing, but rather several layers of feathers.

There is evidence that the Poles imitated the dail. An official account of King Zygmunt III's wedding in 1592 describes a unit of 60 'daila' parading into Krakow wearing 'tigers and wolf skins... eagle wings, white and blue plumes and kopie lances'. The Poles also had their own 'chosen men' known as elesars, selected from the bravest hussars, and these affected the same suicidal bravery of Ottoman daili and sererçechi volunteers. Elears played a key role in many actions of the 1580-1629 period, 'opening' the battle with a reckless charge to disorder the enemy before the main attack.

Depictions of Polish elesars are rare and they probably differed little from ordinary hussars. It is only in 1627-28 that the Dutchman Abraham Booth shows several unarmoured winged horsemen who may well be elesars. Our elesar [3] is based on a watercolour added to Booth's journal (see picture on page 62). We interpret his wing as of the style worn by Balkan grenaier cavalry in an Ottoman costume book of c.1590 (Codex Vindob. 8626, OBN, Vienna). The frameless wing is strapped loosely around the neck. The rest of the elesar's equipment is more typical of Polish cossacks than hussars, and he may be a member of the Lisowski cossacks, who began to call themselves elesars in the 1620s.

This type of wing, worn on the shoulders, did not survive long. Soon after the Balkan shield was abandoned, the hussar went over to a frame wing attached to the left side of the saddle. A possible 'missing link' in this migration [4] may be depicted in Merian's fancy dress Hungarian heroes who took part in the Stuttgart carousel of 1616. They appear to be wearing frame- wings attached to their left arm, in place of a shield.

Ultimately the frame wing switched from the saddle to the back [5]. The first clear image of such a wing comes only in 1645, with Colonel Szczodrowski—a member of the Polish delegation to Paris (see page 41). Unfortunately, the contemporary illustrations do not show how his ostrich wing is attached. We reconstruct it with the help of the Skokolster wing (pages 28-29). The cuirasses of Szczodrowski's clothing are taken from Della Bella's sketches and the official French government account of the event.
**F: HUSSAR TOWARZYSZ, c.1680s**

Much of our traditional image of the hussar was created by the collection of hussar equipment at Podhorze Palace. This gear is said to have been worn at Vienna in 1683 by the company of Crown Grand Hetman Stanislaw Jabłonowski, though its use in the 18th century is a legend.

Hussar armour is usually classified into an early or ‘Older type’ (typ starzy), with a distinct ridge down the middle of each element of the suit, which Bochenski dated provisionally to 1640-75, and a ‘Younger type’ (typ młodszy) of c.1675-c.1730, which had cleaner lines and often dispensed with the gorget. Bochenski's datings have acquired the status of gospel, but may be incorrect by several decades.

[1] Our central figure wears a Podhorze suit of ‘Younger type’, now at the Hermitage Museum. His cuirass is taken from the garment captured at Narva in 1700, while his boots are from the Livrustkammaren. His single wing is covered with plain leather, and is the most common surviving type of wing, easily outnumbering the variety lined with velvet and brass, most of which are modern replicas. Though worn singly rather than in pairs, the extra-long feathers at the top give these wings a particularly spectacular appearance.

The detail of the wing [2] is based on examples in the Krakow National Museum, which are similar to those from Podhorze. The feathers are sewn between two leather-covered wooden battens. The twin fastening points are reinforced with iron, and slot into fittings on the armour backplate.

[3] A hussar armour of the ‘Older type'. A handful of such suits survive, with almost identical decoration – copious amounts of brass strip applied over the steel surfaces. Though splendid from a distance, the decoration [4] is quite primitive, consisting of simple punchwork and engraving that even a village smith could achieve.

The most common breast appliqué was the stylized knight's cross [5]. It is often said this was the mark of a noble, but since it also appears on lower-quality armour made for rear-rankers, it was probably no more than a nationality mark – compare the cross on most Polish standards. It is thought that appliqués depicting theVirgin Mary with Child [6] were connected with a chivalric Order of the Immaculate Conception, which King Wladyslaw IV attempted to set up in 1633-37. But they may just be standard Catholic imagery: a few surviving appliqués depict St George and Archangel Michael, and these doubtless refer to recruitment in the Commonwealth's Orthodox eastern provinces or even Russia.

Note the huge length of the koncerz sword [7]. Its awkwardness has led some authorities to suggest it was no more than a parade weapon; in reality, it was especially useful during pursuit. By the late 17th century the Polish sabre [8] had reached the pinnacle of its evolution. It now had a fully closed hilt to protect the knuckles, and a thumb-ring on the guard to speed recovery of the weapon between blows.

Polish hairstyles altered greatly over the period: from the 'flat mohican' style popular in the early 17th century [9], to a style peculiar to the 1640s and 50s [10] with front and sides shaved and only the back left to grow (sometimes very long as here) and the monk-like tourse [11] favoured by Sobieski, which was widely copied from the 1670s.

**G: THE CHARGE OF PRINCE ALEXANDER SOBIESKI'S COMPANY AT VIENNA, 1683**

At about 4pm on 12 September 1683, King Jan Sobieski released 3,000 Polish hussars towards Vienna and destiny. However, prior to the hussar's most famous charge, the Polish king tested that the ground was suitable for cavalry by sending out the hussar company of his infant son Alexander (1677-1714) on a sacrificial charge towards the Turkish lines.

The eyewitness Dyakowski saw the company disappear into a cloud of gun-smoke and dust, catching an occasional glimpse of the unit's flag 'which was of half black and half hot-yellow silk, on which was a white eagle'. The 19th-century Austrian historian Anton Dolceczek mentions that this unit had black and yellow lance pennants. This has not been confirmed in 17th-century sources, although black and yellow is a common combination, and pennants usually matched the company flag. A simple chequered pennant is the most common design seen in the art of Sobieski's reign.

The flag [1] carried by the chorazy (standard bearer) is reconstructed from other 17th-century flags, with Sobieski's 'Janina' clan badge (a Balkan shield) added on the eagle's breast. His cap is a Criman camel hair burka.

The towarzysz [2] is based on the central figure in Altomonte's colossal painting of the battle commissioned by Sobieski in 1684 but not completed until the 1690s. We have removed some of Altomonte's unflattering additions, but left the kawasce armguards with mittens and armour cuisses (thigh guards). Surviving hussar armour suits are not normally made with cuisses, yet Beauplan (1640s), Gramont (1664) and Brulig (1693) mention hussars wearing them. Possibly these were from obsolete western cuissard armour fitted to hussar suits by their owners.

The pacholik (retainer) [3] is taken from German/Austrian depictions of the battle, which frequently show hussars wearing caps rather than helmets. His cheaper equipment includes a wolfkin.

The trumpeter [4] is based on one of the few surviving battle-paintings from Podhorze by De Baan, dating from c.1660. He is one of a pair of unarmoured trumpeters accompanying a company of armoured hussars in the battlefront-lined cap is again typical of retainers and camp servants.

**LEFT** Husars of Duke Janusz Radziwill at Kiev in 1651 during the Ukrainian Cossack Rebellion. The two company flags have simple knight's cross devices and ball-shaped finials, and are dwarfed by the hussar lances with their long pennants. There were no regulations on the design of hussar standards. Traditionally they were larger than the standards of lighter grades of Polish cavalry, and had either a rounded fly or two tails. They were carried on a staff of about 3.5m length, shorter than the 5m hussar lance, but more richly painted and not hollowed out as this would reduce strength. There can be little doubt that the cross-born on most Polish cavalry standards was intended as a national emblem. (From an 18th-century copy of a now-lost sketch by Radziwill's court artist, Abraham van Westerveldt)
Insights into the daily lives of history's fighting men and women, past and present, detailing their motivation, training, tactics, weaponry and experiences.

Polish Winged Hussar 1576–1775

The Polish hussar was 'without doubt one of the most spectacular soldiers in the world'. Most dramatic of all hussar characteristics were the 'wings' worn on the back or attached to the saddle; their purpose has been hotly debated. The hussar's main offensive weapon was an impressive 4–5 metre lance (kopia). This book takes a close look at the origins and development of the Polish 'winged' hussars, and using many years' painstaking research drawn from unpublished Polish sources, provides a rounded view of the training, tactics, appearance and experiences of these legendary and fascinating warriors.