

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Life Events

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LOUIS HUSSAR

Interviewed

by

Jay Toth

on

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LOUIS HUSSAR

William Hussar was born in 1886, and came to this country from Budapest, Hungary, at the age of thirteen. His father was a furniture maker, artist and designer. The art of craftsmanship was passed down. Today, Hussar's Fine Furniture store is located in Salem, Ohio.

Louis Hussar always wanted to be a fighter. His first amateur fight was in Cleveland. He fought over two hundred amateur fights. In 1938, he was rated Tenth Best Featherweight in the world. He fought Sugar Ray Robinson, and lost to a decision. While fighting, he used the names Louis Evans, Young Hussy, and Curly Hussy. He fought Harry Weekly and Mike Raffa in Akron, and Ray Sharkey and Jigs Moran in Cleveland.

During the war, he was a forman in a defense plant in Ravenna. Later, he went to the service, where he was older than most (35 years old). He first ran a bulldozer and scraper in Bainbridge, Maryland, then was stationed aboard the U.S.S. Drayton and shifted to the South Pacific. At a wieght of 132 pounds, he boxed on Halsey's battleship. His best fight was with two Russians. He won both.

Besides his high school education, he went to Baldwin-Wallace for Physical Education. He owned his own gym in East Liverpool, Salem and Lisbon.

Mr. Hussar keeps physically fit at his present age, and is a coin collector.

He says that today's fighters have desire, will, and are physically able to fight, but are trained for speed, not for physical contact, and are not as physically fit as past fighters.

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INTERVIEWEE: LOUIS HUSSAR
INTERVIEWER: Jay Toth
SUBJECT: World War II, Sports, Boxing
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T: This is an interview with Mr. Louis Hussar for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Jay Toth, on November 30, 1979.

Can you tell me something about your parents, when you were born?

H: My parents came from Pest; it is Budapest now. They came from Hungary in 1908. My father was nineteen and my mother was three years younger, sixteen. His father was also a furniture maker. At that time they made furniture out of wood; there wasn't any upholstery or anything like that. My father was farmed out at the age of seven to learn the trade of upholstering. He lived at the people's house and went to school every day and worked there to learn the trade. They didn't have any vacations like we have here. He went to school for eight hours; after eight hours then you worked at the place for so many hours. You hardly had any money, but you learned the trade. Anyhow, he got equal to a high school education, but it was almost equal to a Bachelor's degree here in college. He was a designer. He drew a scale and measured everything. He was so smart that he could take a little picture and tell you how big it was when it was taken. He was a wonderful artist. He was what we call a copier. He could copy anybody's painting to absolute detail. He could draw very well. He couldn't talk good English, but he could speak seven different languages. He came over to this country with Mr. and Mrs. Kronheim, who, in those years, developed one of the biggest upholstering factories in Cleveland.

Then we migrated to Columbiana, Ohio when I was thirteen. I had a real good voice and my father wanted me to be a singer and play the violin. I lived in a tough section of Cleveland

(east side) and they made fun of me all the time. I always wanted to be a fighter because we lived in the foreign section.

At the age of twelve I was sneaking downtown and trying to learn how to fight from some of the old pros. When I was thirteen years old I had my first amateur fight; it was in Cleveland on the east side. They had east end houses; they didn't have any recreation places. Every block we used to have a house that the kids would play in; they called them east end houses. The old pros would come up there and help you. I won the Golden Gloves in 1936 in Cleveland. From then on in 1938 I was rated the 10th best featherweight in the world. I then had twenty-two professional fights, but I fought among the best. I even fought Sugar Ray Robinson in Akron in the theatre when he was barnstorming, getting fights here and there. I'm one of the few boys that he didn't knock out, but I dropped him in the third round. He was very fast and very clever. I went with him pretty hard, but I lost the decision. I didn't get knocked out. He knocked about everybody out. That was one pride I had.

Then I went on from there. I fought all over the United States. I fought in Kent, Youngstown, Cleveland, and Akron around here, plus Pennsylvania and New York.

When the war started, I was then in my thirties. I had to work in some plant that had something to do with the war. I was a bay leader or a foreman at the arsenal making big bombs in Ravenna. What happened there, I was not careful and got TNT poisoning. My hair was red and my clothes were all red. They told me I had to work outside for a while. I worked outside for a while and I didn't like that in the wintertime so I said, "I'll quit." He said, "Well, you'll have to go to the service." I had four children, but I went. When I got in the service, after they looked at my records, I could run a bulldozer and a scraper and I had a lot of bossing experience, so they put me in the coxswain rate. They didn't have any specialty rates then. I did study hand-to-hand combat years ago, and through my boxing I had many Japanese-American friends. I already was proficient in Judo and jujitsu and when I went to the service, however, they sent me to Bainbridge, Maryland to learn this stuff. I wasn't paying too much attention because it was all basic, and I already knew it. It is something I've done quite often. The officer in charge said, "Hey swabbie, did you come here to learn or not pay attention?" I said, "Sir, if you show me something I don't know, I'll be willing to look, but those things are just basic." He said, "Oh, you're one of those smarties. Get up here." I was getting into the ring and he said, "What would you do if I reached for you?" He reached out and I threw him out of the ring and knocked him out. He woke up and got up and didn't say much. That night they called my name and number and said, "Get your gear ready, you're

being shipped out." They shipped me out right in the South Pacific.

When they were taking the 7th Marines, we were out in the harbor. The Seabee's were already gone and they didn't have enough people to fix the airstrip. Since I knew how to run the bulldozer, I was working on that while the Japanese were sniping at us.

When we were on the island we were harassed by the Japanese planes. There was another island about three or four miles away. There were Japanese on there and we would send our beer for their Saki. We would throw it in the water and they would send some back. They didn't have any food or anything, except when the submarines came. They couldn't fire at us because they ran out of ammunition.

The fighters would get guys ready to put on fights because ships were coming in and had some kind of entertainment. In the meantime, there was nobody in my weight class; I weighed about 132 pounds and was a lightweight. That is as high as I weighed then. There were a lot of boys that came in that fought around the country. When they had somebody my weight they would ask me to fight, so that's why I fought.

First, I was in the Atlantic Theatre War on the destroyer, the U.S.S. Draketon. As the war was going more towards the South Pacific and it was kind of running down in Germany, we were shifted over to the South Pacific. We had a great, big tournament on Allsey's battleship. They had a couple of good fighters on there too. They brought us fellows from the destroyer and I fought on Allsey's battleship. I had two fights and I fought twice in that day. I can't be too proud of the fights because most of the boys had little experience. I bombed them out pretty fast. I kept on fighting. I fought for the fleet title in the Atlantic-Pacific Theatre War. I fought two boys, one by the name of Huff from New York. He was a very light-skinned Negro. I fought him for the title. I nearly won by a knockout, but the bell saved him in the last round.

When we went to the South Pacific Theatre War we had a big tournament on the islands laying around it. In that eight month period I had eighteen straight knockouts. I didn't want to be beat, and most of the guys were tough. The officers in charge were not to be beat, and most of the guys were tough. The officers in charge were not that smart in the fight game. They put on the fights and a lot of them refereed or had some college experience in boxing, but they weren't pros. My greatest fights were with the two Russians on the Man O War. I beat both of those boys. I beat them by foul means because I used about twenty yards of black tape and tin foil on my knuckles. I broke the

gloves and tightened them up so they couldn't see where they were broke. I had throat staves on my wrist. Every time I hit that Russian a big carbuncles came out on him. He was short, squat, and hard-looking. I knew he would be easy to hit. Those that are easy to hit are hard to put down--I know this from experience. I beat him pretty bad. I took two of them that way pretty good.

We fought all over, including the small islands. We were in Tahiti and all around. That's when the war was settling down. I was stationed on the island Enaweetok. The Japanese would fly over the island and shoot at our positions and our planes.

One of our planes coming in was running out of fuel and the motor was missing. They're supposed to hit the drink; they're not supposed to come in and land. They want you to hit the water and bail out. You had about two minutes before you sank. This pilot didn't want to do that and he was coming in too fast. There was no way to stop. He came in and hit several of our planes; there were about 250 planes sitting in there and we had the bombs on them. He hit the planes and I received a medal for getting under the planes on the ground and unhooking the wires off the bombs so they wouldn't explode. We were bombing Wake Island every day. It was twenty-four hour bombing. When they quit bombing Wake Island and they took it, there were more Japanese on it than when they originally started. The submarines would bring the Japs in.

My fighting experience around here was something because I was just a young kid, thirteen years old when I came to Columbiana from Cleveland. I always thought I was really tough because I fought all of the time when there was a fight on the street. Somebody told me they had some boxers up in Lisbon, Ohio. I wanted to see who all those fighters were. Huey Evans of Lisbon gave me the boxing lesson of my life, and he was a year younger than I was; he was twelve years old. He made me look silly. I was going at him with everything. Once in a while I would hit him and he would shake his head. He battered me up pretty bad, and I said, "I'll be back." I was back the next day, black eyes and busted mouth. I stayed with him. When I turned professional, I fought under the name of Lou Evans. I fought many really good boys. I fought in New York, Pittsburgh; I fought in Madison Square Garden twice.

T: Who were the fighters you fought there?

H: I can remember I fought Harry Weakley, and he was state champion of New Orleans, LA. He was rated tenth best. He was also a lightweight. I fought him in Akron. I fought Mike Ratha, rated tenth best featherweight too. I lost to him once and then beat him the second time. I fought Gene Panos; he was from out of Akron, Ohio. They were top pros

at that time. I also fought another guy by the name of Robinson, and Ray Sharkey from Cleveland. I fought in a lot of smokers. That was where you went in with bigger gloves and you slam banged each other to death to make it look good for the crowd or you wouldn't get paid. I fought Jigs Moran from Cleveland, Babe Friscaro, one of the best featherweights to ever come out of the city of Cleveland. He became president of the Pipefitters Union. He was in the mafia. They had him in Life magazine one time. They wanted to know what he did with \$250,000 of union money; he built a statue to himself he said.

I had a high school education, and my high school education was very, very rigid because not only did I come out of high school, but I also had two years of physical education. I wanted to have some schooling and therapy. I went to Baldwin-Wallace in the evening and just took those subjects that I wanted. At that time you could pick the subject and the hours. After that I went into the service. My father was a designer and we grew up the German way--you do it or bam in the mouth. I was already designing and drawing to scale when I was twelve.

The fight game was tough because at that time it was the Depression. You fought hard for \$5, \$10, \$15. I fought many a ten-rounder for \$25, \$30. You better win or you don't get another fight. In those years, to keep fighting you fought pro and amateur both, which was not right if you were a pro. To pick up a few bucks you did this, so you changed your name. I fought under the name of Young Hussey, and KO Hussey, and Curly Hussey, just to keep fighting. Now you have to have a card and belong to the AAU. At that time you fought everything and everybody and everywhere you could. You never questioned who they were or anything. If you had a fight out of your class, that was all right, you fought. They didn't care. Weight didn't even matter.

In the war most of us buried around 10,000 Japanese that laid in the sun for over two weeks. You know how bad that was. We did that with bulldozers. Most of the sailors and soldiers would knock their teeth because most Japanese had gold teeth. After you're there a while you don't think of it as death anymore. You don't think of them as human beings anymore; you see so much of it that you get kind of hardened. At first I got sick and vomited because the stench was awful. Then I used to sit on a dead body and eat my sandwich. That is how callous you get after a while. You had to bury all the bodies because it doesn't go much below 100 degrees. It is very hot on the islands except they have a breeze from east to west. Most of the planes that were damaged, we built a wall with them. All we would take off of a plane that we could use were the clocks.

T: What was so important about the clocks?

H: Nothing, we just got to keep them. Everything was almost new and we would throw it overboard because it took up space. There was a lot of waste.

When we were first on the island in the chow line, we got our big plate and our chow. There was a little, black-haired guy in front of me. He was walking with me and I wasn't paying any attention because there were a lot of Philipinos. To me the Japanese and the Philipinos looked a lot alike at first. I didn't know the difference. Pretty soon, four big, burly Marines came in and shot him right in front of me. He was a sniper and he was starving so he stood in line with us. Who would know? We were just on the island and they fill up your plate, and this how they were living.

The snipers there would never move out of position; you had to get in their line of fire. When you walked in their line of fire then they fired. There is so much noise you don't know where the shot is coming from.

I don't like to talk much about the war because it has been so long ago and it has gotten so that it is something in the past. My experience of fighting and owning my own gym and having a lot of fighters and things like that are even better for me.

T: You say you owned your own gym?

H: I had one in East Liverpool above the People's Drugstore. I had one in Lisbon above a poolroom. Then I had one in Salem right here on Jennings Avenue; I had weightlifting and boxing there. I ran those things and had some pretty good fighters. I enjoyed that very much.

T: You said today you swam a half of a mile?

H: Yes. Then, of course, I work out. It is nothing for me to sit down on the floor and do 3,000 situps. That is normal for me.

Then in the course of my life I became a coin collector. My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather used to collect coins. When they died it reverted to me so I have quite a coin collection.

T: What do you think of the fighters today?

H: I think what they're doing today is like what a coach in high school does or in college, picks out the very best with the greatest potential and puts all their time and effort into them. We don't have the boxing gyms that we

used to have years ago. Every town and little city had one. The fighters today are not trained to take a beating; they're trained for speed and so on, and to win. We were trained to physically take one and keep going and being in terrific shape. I was just as good and just as hard in my last round as I was in my first because we trained so hard. I don't hear of fighters running ten to twenty miles anymore. I hear them running three, four or five miles. We would train for hours in the gym and we were hard and tough. I think concentration, though, is ninety percent of your physical makeup. If you don't have it . . .

END OF INTERVIEW