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Military History

Croatian Field Marshal Siskovich (1719-1783) for 45 years in service of Austrian Army

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Abstract

The authors have been exploring and trying to expose a long-lasting military career of one of the great Croats, using archive sources in Zagreb and Vienna. Nowadays his name has been forgotten, but during the 18th century he had been accomplished unbelievable deeds and successes that were celebrated all across the Croatian historical territories. His name is Joseph Siskovich (in historical literature Siskovics, Siskovich or Žišković), and he was born on 2 July, 1719, in Szegedin (today Szeged), Southern Hungary and died on 4 February, 1783, in Prague, Bohemia. Due to his extraordinary courage and talent in military art and science he received the title of the Imperial Count. His numerous achievements during Austrian Army campaigns and battles provided him with the highest ranks: *General Feldwachtmeister* (1757-1759), *Feldmarshal Lieutenant* (1759-1766), *Feldzeugmeister* (1766-1783), and, for the most distinguished officers, the Commander Cross of the Maria Theresa Order.

Already at the Battle of Collin, on 18 June, 1757, he went with the objective to struggle to earn the Knight's Cross of the Maria Theresa Order. He behaved with such a courage and devotion that before the battle he had said to his Lieutenant Colonel *de Vettes* (he himself was Colonel of the 2nd Infantry Regiment): "My friend, today we want to earn the ribbon." A Prussian column just came out from the village of Chotenitz and rushed towards the standing Siskovich's regiment. The Prussians received an effective musket fire that caused them to

waver. Then, Siskovich attacked and drove them back to the village. The King of Prussia, who witnessed the whole event with his own eyes, immediately gathered the troubled troops, and again led them out of the village against the Austrians. But the regiment with Siskovich at the forehead, decisively threw the Prussians back for the second time, and three more times afterwards, causing such a shock in the enemy ranks that even the king was unable to bring his soldiers to a sixth attack. At the last attack of the Prussians, Siskovich had been badly wounded, but did not leave the battlefield until the victorious outcome of the battle was decided. In addition to the promotion to general-major, he received in the 2nd Promotion of August 1, 1758, as the only one, the Knight's Cross of the Maria Theresa Order, for, while he was still on his wounds. The whole *Kaiser's* officer corps recognized his courage and steadily intervened for highest decoration. In the following years Siskovich participated in the attack on the Prussian convoy near Domstadt. In the Battle of Hochkirch on 13/14 October, 1758, he charged before dawn with his grenadier brigade and the regiment of Archduke Charles. He stormed the hill, defended two redoubts, whose crew consisted of seven battalions, drove the crew into flight, took all the cannon and tents, and decisively defended his position. He was extraordinary man, soldier, organizer and fighter.

After many fighting episodes during Seven Years' War, in 1763 Siskovich became member of the Court War Council in Vienna. Then, he was the General-Inspector of the Croatia's and Slavonia's Military Border from 1768 to 1775. This military function had been established in 1765 by Empress Maria Theresa. In July 1769 Siskovich inspected Karlovac Border General Command and started to reorganize all border regiments. By successfully accomplishing border duties he received the Imperial Count title. In 1775 he was appointed military commander in Galicia, and in 1779 military commander in Bohemia where he died at the age of 64. He was buried in the St. Sigismund's Chapel, Cathedral of St. Vitus in Prague.

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