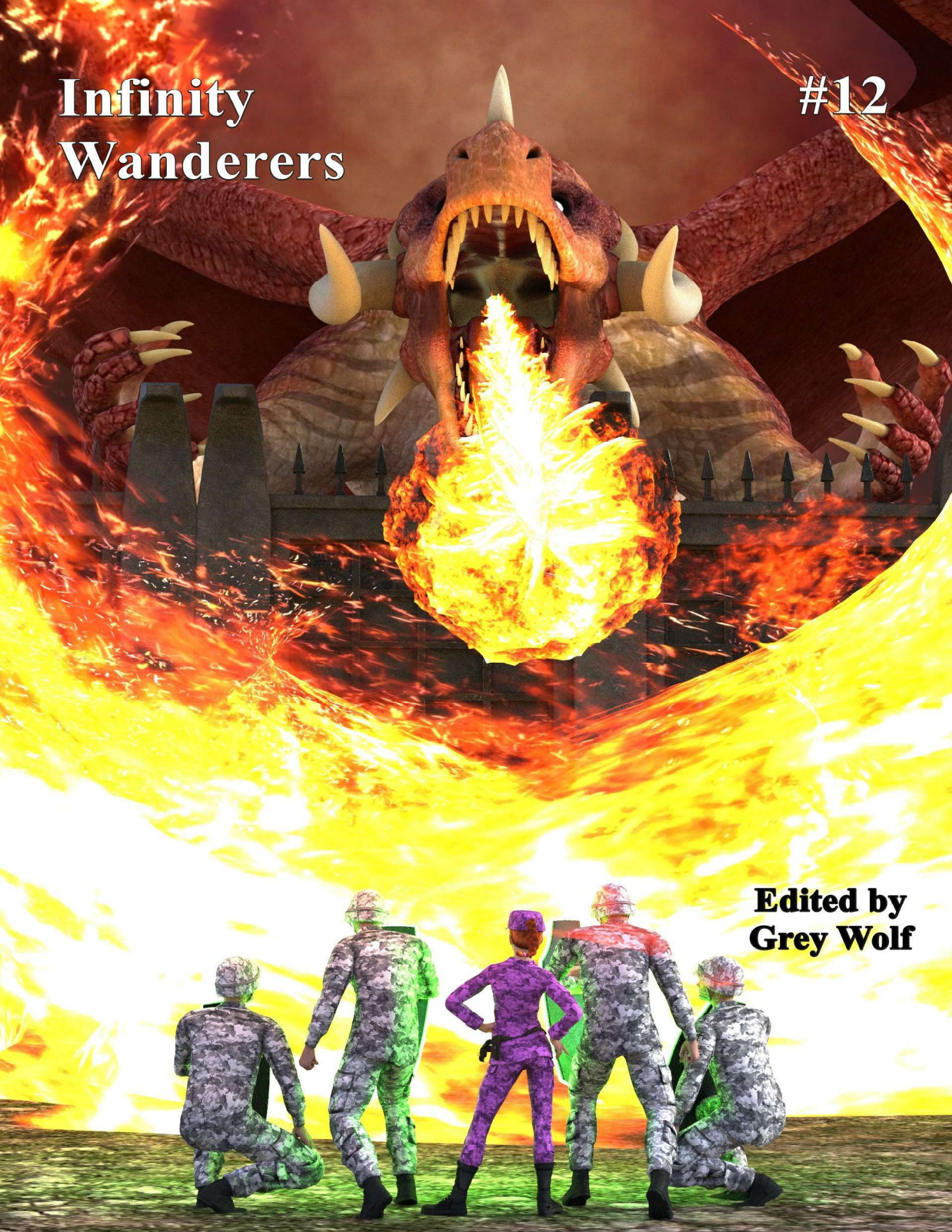


Infinity Wanderers

#12



**Edited by
Grey Wolf**

The Skillful Treatment of a Musketball Wound

By Matias Travieso-Diaz

*I have resolved never to start an unjust war
but never to end a legitimate one except by defeating my enemies*
King Charles XII of Sweden

TO THE DIRECTORS OF THE COLLEGIUM MEDICUM OF STOCKHOLM

PETITION FOR A MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO JOHAN KILIAN HAGSTRÖM

On the occasion of the forthcoming anniversary of the passing of Master Johan Kilian Hagström (“Master Hagström”), the undersigned, Johan Olaf Hagström, son of the deceased and a member of the Collegium Medicum, respectfully petitions that a memorial tribute be written and published by the Collegium in honor of his father, a distinguished member of this institution who was chief army surgeon during the military campaigns conducted by His Majesty King Charles XII during the period 1700 – 1718 and, following King Charles’ death, chief army surgeon for over a decade during the reigns of Queen Ulrika Eleonora and King Frederick I.

In support of this Petition, the undersigned states as follows:

1. In 1660, Master Hagström became a member of the barbers’ guild by receiving training from Mathias Bernhard Ribe, chief barber-surgeon to the court of King Charles XI, and passing a qualification exam. Following his qualification as a barber-surgeon, Master Hagström was chosen to occupy a number of positions in support of the Kingdom’s military operations abroad.
2. In 1700, during the early years of the reign of King Charles XII, the foreign rulers of Denmark–Norway, Saxony and Russia united in an unholy alliance against Sweden, leading to a prolonged war that pitched our nation against each and all of those states. Of the numerous military encounters that occurred during the war, Master Hagström served during, among others, the early Battles of Narva (November 1700), Kliszow (July 1702), and

Holowczyn (July 1708), all great victories for the Swedish arms. Throughout these military campaigns he provided medical assistance, supervision and support in the treatment of the injuries sustained by our wounded soldiers, as well as those suffered by captured enemy combatants. He carried out or supervised the control, cleaning and dressing of wounds, the performance of minor and major surgeries, and such amputations and other treatments as were required.

3. Of particular importance during the early years of Master Hagström's tenure as a lead barber-surgeon for the Swedish army was his involvement in the Battle of Poltava (July 1709), the pivotal event in the Swedish war with Russia that led to our nation's eventual victory. As is well known, His Majesty Charles XII had launched in 1708 an invasion of Russia, aiming at capturing or destroying, Moscow and seizing the newly founded Russian city of Saint Petersburg on the Baltic Sea. Because of the severity of the 1708-09 winter, the Swedish forces were forced to suspend their progress into Russia and had to move south to winter quarters in Ukraine. While there, they came upon the city of Poltava, which had been fortified by the Russians against our army's advance. Poltava thus became the focal point of the Swedish invasion.

4. Three days before the scheduled Swedish attack on Poltava, fire from a Russian sniper team caused a musket-ball round to land next to King Charles XII and leaden fragments of the ball were driven into his left foot. All musket-ball injuries are extremely dangerous, for impact by the ball or its fragments can lead to the loss of a limb or cause blood poisoning and potential death. Accordingly, Master Hagström took it upon himself to personally attend to the King's wound, which was quite severe and was already causing the foot to start swelling rapidly.

5. Master Hagström had developed an expert method for caring for musket-ball wounds. Such wounds lack an "exit wound," as the lead ball or its fragments flatten and become lodged within the victim's body without running through it. Thus, Master Hagström needed

to find and remove the ball fragments from the King's foot as the initial step in the treatment. To do so, he searched for the fragments lodged in the foot by inserting a long metal probe into the King's wound. The feel of metal touching metal is different from that of metal in contact with bone or sinew, and by probing Master Hagström was able to locate three metallic pieces lodged in the King's foot. Then, these pieces then needed to be removed one by one the same way they came in, using long forceps or pliers commonly known as "crow's bills" to pry them out. Master Hagström's novel surgical technique included making small incisions in the vicinity of the embedded fragments to facilitate leading them out the injured foot with a minimum of additional damage to the foot.

6. The extraction process was protracted and very painful and, although fortified with a large dose of brandy, the King passed out from the pain while the operation was in progress. After the three fragments were removed, Master Hagström proceeded to clean the wound with vinegar and then applied an herb poultice of his own devising to promote healing, bandaging the foot tightly to minimize further bleeding. The use of this poultice, whose ingredients were kept secret by Master Hagström, prevented infection from setting in and expedited the healing process to a greater degree than it had previously being achieved by field surgeons in Sweden and probably abroad.

7. Upon awakening, the King was in great pain but further swelling of his foot had been avoided; examination of the wound while changing the dressing showed no evidence of the onset of necrosis. Two days after sustaining the wound, the King could stand up with the aid of a padded hardwood crutch, and was able to take a few halting steps around his tent experiencing only tolerable pain.

8. It is important to emphasize that, but for Master Hagström's exemplary treatment of the King's injured foot, His Majesty would have needed to remain bedridden for a significant period of time and would have been incapable of participating in the action at Poltava, having to depend on the skill of his generals for the success of the challenging attack. It will

always remain a matter of conjecture what the outcome of the battle would have been in that event.

9. As it was, as the day of the assault on the town dawned, the King proceeded, with great difficulty but with his usual courage, to ride out at the head of the Swedish forces attacking Poltava. He swiftly led his army past the outside defensive perimeter the Russians had set up and directly assaulted the main Russian defensive positions, overcoming them after a day of furious fighting. By nightfall, the Russians had fled, yielding the field to our victorious forces.

10. The King collapsed on the saddle as the battle concluded and had to be carried bodily to his tent. However, thanks to Master Hagström's continued ministrations, he soon recovered sufficiently from his injury to be able to lead the Swedish forces in their pursuit of the scattered Russian army.

11. The rest is history. After the Poltava rout, the King doubled back northward and captured Moscow after a siege of several weeks, and then proceeded further north to Saint Petersburg, which he took and occupied, cutting off Russia's access to the Baltic Sea. Tsar Peter I had to withdraw his army into the Russian countryside and eventually was forced to sue for peace. His forces depleted and denied access to the sea, Peter had to give up on his territorial ambitions towards the European lands to Russia's north and west.

12. After vanquishing Russia, Charles XII conducted successive campaigns in which he defeated the armies of Denmark, Hanover, and Brandenburg-Prussia to consolidate Sweden's hegemony over the Baltic basin. With the King's conquests, the Swedish Empire provides an effective buffer between the Holy Roman Empire to the west and Russia and the Ottoman Empire to the east. After his death in battle in 1718, King Charles XII left behind a strong, united Sweden whose rule extends throughout Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. His successors have been able to maintain and consolidate Charles' gains.

13. Master Hagström continued to serve the Crown faithfully on the field for fifteen years

until his retirement in 1734, receiving a commendation from King Frederick I. Alas, his retirement was brief, for he passed away a few months after finishing his service.

14. Charles XII compensated Master Hagström generously for his medical treatment, which allowed the King to lead the Swedish army to triumph. Nonetheless, financial retribution does not suffice to appropriately honor the memory of the hero whose expertise and skill helped make the Poltava victory possible and who, through a lifetime of service, contributed to the survival and recovery of many of Sweden's soldiers.

15. Accordingly, the undersigned respectfully requests that a memorial tribute be issued in honor of Johan Kilian Hagström and a proclamation publishing the tribute be distributed throughout the land he so faithfully served.

Signed and sworn to in Stockholm, this 19th day of March, 1736.

Barber-surgeon Johan Olaf Hagström, Member