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A Scandinavian Soldier's Life

Carl-Erik Johansson*

The word *soldier* brings to mind many different pictures - men and women in uniform, weapons in hand, ready to defend their own flag or to attack across an enemy border; men on foot, on horse, on the sea and in the sky, conscripted men, enlisted men, allotment men, men without rank, the infantry men, the cavalry men, the artillery men, the regular soldier, the reserve soldier, the home guard soldier, the private in charge of only himself, the captain in charge of a company, the colonel in charge of a regiment and the general leading the whole army. In other words, the *soldier* is a multi-faceted idea, a many-colored robe.

It is not possible in this paper to cover the whole range of soldiers' lives, especially as Scandinavia covers three distinct and unique kingdoms: Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The soldiers of these three lands lived under different laws and conditions since the countries have lived together in peace only for the last century and three quarters. They nearly came to blows (at least Norway and Sweden) just a few years into our own century.

This paper will give a general overview of how the common soldier may have lived. He made up approximately 80% of all soldiers, while corporals, warrant officers and officers constituted the balance. No effort has been made to include the lives of the officers in this discussion since much has been written about them. Only brief accounts of the warrant officers are included. It may be that life of one's own soldier/forefather may not have developed as described here, only research in extant records will tell.

There is no more eloquent nor sad testimony to the fact that there is not one single personal history or journal of the common soldier known to archivists at the military archives in Copenhagen or Stockholm.¹ Without such personal stories, a complete and accurate account is difficult, if not impossible to fashion although there exist some excellent books and novels depicting the life of a soldier, such as *Raskens* by the famous Swedish author Vilhelm Moberg.²

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With the help of the regimental and military unit histories and a careful study of original sources such as muster and service rolls, probate and court records, census and parish registers, it is possible to compile an acceptable, sometimes even good or occasionally even an excellent chronicle of one's soldier/forefather. As a rule the higher his rank the more information about him may be found.

The Early Armies

The 1600s saw the birth of what may be called the modern armies of Scandinavia. They resulted from the big European religious wars and the conflict between Denmark and Sweden over dominance of Scandinavia.

These armies required a lot of men, on foot, on horseback, and on the sea. The men were recruited mainly in one of four ways:

1. **Conscription** - representatives of the King or Crown simply inducted every tenth man in a village into the army in an arbitrary way.
2. **Enlistment** - a voluntary joining of the army for a set number of years as a career or steppingstone to certain occupations.
3. **Allotment** - a unique Swedish system in which the soldier enlisted and, as a part of his remuneration, received the use of a small croft during his enlistment period.
4. **Compulsory military training for all young men** - a system which has been in effect in all three of the Scandinavian countries for about a century.

DENMARK

The Danish king, who held absolute power from 1660 to 1849, relied on an army of enlisted men, most of whom were German.³ These mercenaries were able to handle the military affairs of the Danish kings until the late 1600s. In 1701, however, a national militia or army was organized to help with the two great military problems facing Denmark - the defense of the island of Sjælland against the Swedes and the defense of its southern border against north Europeans. A large share of the farmhands, farmers and peasants were trained in the use of weapons and organized into units and formations, which in time of war would be ready for action within a very short time. Only those involved with farming were inducted, but they remained more farmers than soldiers. About 15,000 were organized in this manner. Married men and sons of old farmers and widows who were needed on the farm were exempt. However, the unmarried men could not fill the gaps which occurred and eventually married men were also inducted, mostly from the poorer classes, the so called farm lease holders. For some this became a very frustrating experience.

Some married farmers from the island of Fyn complained that they had been dragged from wife and children in the middle of the night. One man complained that there were many healthy and good young men who were free from service. At an earlier conscription session he had had to pay 45 daler to pay another man to take his place, a legal way to escape service. "Is that Christian and right? Do I have both to give away my money and then go myself - it is wrong in the highest degree. If I were healthy, however, I would not refuse but serve my King according to my duty and responsibility, but I am both deaf and weak and unsuitable for such things."⁴

Another soldier explained that he had not been accepted at the conscription session, but that when he reached his home, those that took his place caught him and cut off a foot of his beard so that he would look younger and thus be accepted as a soldier.⁵

The military service was rather simple so that it would not interfere with farming. It consisted of a few hours of drill on Sunday afternoon after the church service. Four times a year the entire company would gather for a full-scale practice, and once a year they would gather for regimental maneuvers. The soldier would serve for six years but could be discharged if he leased a farm.

It was the hope that the militia would be popular, or at least not unpopular, and therefore both officers and warrant officers were forbidden to treat inductees with harshness, profanity or physical violence and were instructed to train them with all patience.

Resistance would, however, be punished by whipping, but not as to cause injury to life and limb. The drill area would have a pillory and a wooden horse and if someone would not be present at the practice session he would have to stand at the pillory or ride the wooden horse for an hour.

The military service was a burden for the farm hands and farmers even though it looked rather simple. The military duty was unpopular among them, not only because it robbed them of their only spare time on Sunday afternoons, but also because the officers still whipped the men during drills.

While some changes took place both in the standing and the numbers of soldiers, the principles of induction remained basically the same. Only unmarried farm boys were inducted and drills were brief and far between. Farm life went on undisturbed and the farmers actually led very little of a soldier's life.

In 1849 a new Danish constitution was adopted, doing away with the absolute monarchy and giving individual citizens a greater share in the government. With this came the principle borrowed from the French Revolution half a century earlier that every man had a right and duty to defend his country. This idea pervaded

all of Scandinavia and changed army recruitment from mainly enlistment and conscription to compulsory military service. The professional soldier without rank was replaced by the inducted soldier who would serve a few years in the first line, then a few years in the reserve, and finally a few more years in the reinforcement troops. This change occurred in Denmark first and about 25 years later in Norway and at the turn of the last century in Sweden. Under this system a special soldier's life did not develop, as only unmarried were inducted and the length of service was never more than a few months.

The Enlisted Soldier

All sorts of people were to be found among the enlisted men, both good and bad, just as is the case today. It is an injustice, however, to believe that every unit consisted of wretched individuals, not fit for society, but only for the strict discipline existing in the military. Often our knowledge of the enlisted soldier stems from the discipline rolls. Certainly they tell the truth and often throw a sharp light on some of the interesting features of the life of soldiers of past eras, but from these rolls we only learn about the most undisciplined individuals; we learn very little about the large group of soldiers who do not appear in these rolls.

To be enlisted was a way of life, not a temporary occupation for such times as there was nothing else to do. The soldier who once had pledged allegiance to the flag of his realm often remained a soldier as long as his strength permitted, sometimes until he reached his sixtieth year.

The more gifted and diligent among the enlisted men were promoted and could eventually attain the rank of warrant officer. Many of these married even though the government considered a married leader a nuisance. Officers were the property of the army, that is the government, body and soul. The government would have nothing to do with the soldier's family life. There could be no thought of the family as we know it today.⁶

The warrant officer had difficulty feeding his family on his salary of 22 shillings a day. He had a legal right to eke out his income, usually by polishing the military issues - the white sword belt, the cartridge box and the saber. The soldier who worked in the village or city for his keep had no time for polishing (no eight hour work days for them). He paid the warrant officer six shillings for the polish on the days he was on guard duty - every fourth day. The wives of the warrant officers did the laundry for the soldiers and sold bread and whiskey to them at the drill encampments or ran a private post exchange in their homes.⁷

Many warrant officers worked as scribes and artisans, theater extras, models and police officers in order to stretch their meager army wage.

Most warrant officers received special benefits for the education of their

children - free schooling, books and as a rule some clothing on the king's birthday. This was probably very welcome since the children were usually bareheaded and wore wooden clogs, the cheapest footwear available.

Warrant officers also received two shillings a day in their sons' fourth year if they agreed to raise the boys as musicians, playing the drum or fife. When the boys became ten years old they received a regimental musician's number but remained students at the garrison school until their confirmation.

The company commander also took an interest in his men's children. On Saturdays, the students at the garrison school had to take their grade books to him, and I do not think that we imagine too much when we say that he probably gave them a friendly pat, a well-done for a good effort, as well as an admonition to those who had been lacking in diligence.

Allegiance to the King and Realm

The swearing-in of a soldier was in most cases an impressive ceremony that left its mark of distinction, duty and honor on the new soldier. In 1848, a soldier wrote to his parents from Copenhagen:

"Our King died on January 20 and it was a difficult day for us. We rested in bed when the drums sounded General March so we jumped up, for when the General March is sounded, all military men are to meet at the battalion alarm field, ready to march with full knapsack, and all of the city's gates to be closed. There we were in one place from early morning until 11:30 a.m. in the frost and the cold of that day. Then finally His Royal Highness, the Governor Prince Wilhelm of Hessen arrived. Then we marched into the schoolhouse, battalion by battalion. Then we formed a circle around the Governor and all of our officers. We were given the command 'Rifle in left hand, at foot.' Now the Governor shouted three times in his German accent: 'Christian VIII is dead! Long live King Fredrik VII' and he shouted every time with emotion in his voice. Now the oath was read to us, and the officers stood hat in hand and we held three fingers up in the air during this time. Then followed three hurrahs by all of us, whereupon we marched out and others marched in. While this went on the artillery fired so that the houses shook in the whole city and not until we had pledged did the gates of the city open again."⁸

NORWAY

The Norwegian army was organized in 1628.⁹ It was made up of 6,000-7,000 foot soldiers. It was not a standing army, as the inductees were soldiers only when needed. This levied army was an army of farmers or a militia, armed with pikes and some simple rifles, which were slow to fire. The officers were appointed from among the more successful farmers. At times some had to do garrison duty for some months in order to keep the few Norwegian forts in good condition.

In 1687 Norway received its first regiment of volunteers. A couple of de-

cedes later the king decreed that the soldiers should remain on the rolls for nine years. Some years later, this time was stretched to ten years' service for the infantry and twelve years for the cavalry.

In the last year of the 18th century a change came in the selection of soldiers. Prior to that time, the responsibility had been on the farms to furnish a soldier. Now the soldiers were inducted according to the size of the population, making the service a personal burden instead of a burden on the land or the farm. But still the load was carried by the farm boys, as only unmarried farmers, or rather peasants, could be inducted and the age was raised to twenty years.

Through a series of five laws enacted between 1816 and 1885, the duty to serve became a burden for all, not only for the farmers. The right to get someone to take one's place in the army was repealed in 1876 and compulsory military training was instituted. The city militia was discontinued in 1881. By the law of 1885 a soldier was assigned to the first line for five years, behind the lines for four years and finally in the reserve for another four years. In 1899 these thirteen years were extended to sixteen years by adding one year to front line duty and two years for service behind the lines.

Today, with the many special services, an inductee will train for about one year and be called up about every three years for a few weeks of additional training.

With the organization of the army, every farm or group of farms, depending on the size, had to furnish a soldier. Obviously the army desired to have the tallest, strongest and smartest men, while the farmers wanted them as farm hands. The army usually won out. No wonder the officers engaged in the wars of Europe were impressed with them. One wrote: "They were unmatched, handsome people."¹⁰ The service must not have been too strenuous because the soldiers in Bø Parish in Telemark County "were seldom in battle and there was a long time between each encampment."¹¹ They were farming most of the time. Another source states, "The soldiers held their Sunday drills and weapon training two or three times a year to get used to the rifle and the uniform."¹²

The drills were usually held in the area around the parish church or in close proximity to it, in full view of the parishioners. One may wonder today, when one hears that the Bø parish soldiers had a practice field next to the church, no bigger than 70 x 40 feet, scarcely large enough to drill forty soldiers at a time.¹³

According to the law the Norwegian soldier, so long as he remained on the rolls, was to "be respected and honored at all gatherings before other men, as well as always to be seated or walk ahead of them."¹⁴ A dragoon or warrant officer was entitled to an honorable burial, the church bells were to be rung without charge and he was to be accompanied to the grave by all military personnel in the parish - high as well as low. If for no reason of his own he was poor, his regiment was to

pay for the funeral. It was considered an honor to be in the service of the king.

Of those who advanced into the lower ranks it is stated, "Even though most of the lower rank officers and warrant officers had little theoretical schooling, they still made up a rather important social stratum, living within the regimental area and assigned farms. They became the first architects and they made drawings of many of the old Norwegian churches and farms."¹⁵

SWEDEN

During the Middle Ages the most common way to defend against an enemy was to have all male villagers come together armed with whatever could be found - rocks, pokes, shovels, cross bows, etc. - in order to drive away the enemy.

With the more stable organization of the Scandinavian countries - Denmark and Norway on one side and Sweden and Finland on the other - organized armies came into being. The conscripted soldier was born, the farm hand who received some training now and then in the vicinity of the parish church after church services on Sundays. This army did not prove satisfactory to the Swedish government despite the great military and political victories on the continent and in Denmark in the early 1600s. The leaders felt that they needed a more permanent and better trained army. The allotment soldier was born and he lasted for more than two centuries. The last one was not discharged until the middle of the 20th century.

The Allotment System

The allotment system was a unique Swedish creation, unlike any army in the world. The soldiers made up a large segment of Swedish society, living under unique social conditions.

The average number of allotment regiments was 25 with an enrollment of more than 20,000 soldiers and an average age of 20 years of service per soldier.

An estimated one quarter of a million men served as soldiers during the more than two centuries that the allotment army was in existence.¹⁶

In the 1680s the Swedish king, Charles XI, as absolute ruler, contracted with the Swedish provinces to raise one regiment each. Every province agreed to raise and maintain one regiment of 1,200 soldiers, always trained and ready for war. The king in return promised the farmers freedom from induction. The king, however, reserved the right to induct those in the countryside who were not engaged in farming.

The farmers were not only to recruit the soldiers, but were also to maintain and support them in times of peace. Shelter, usually in the form of a croft

as well as clothing and remuneration were expected as well. This support was provided by dividing the regimental area (the province) into 1,200 wards. Each ward employed and maintained one soldier.

Each ward would consist of from two to fifteen farms, depending on size, and 150 wards were combined into a company territory. Eight company territories made up the regimental territory, which comprised the 1,200 wards.

In contrast to the conscripted army, the allotment army was a standing troop, always ready for mobilization. The organization was the same in peace as in war. The troops could march directly to the battleground from their homes. The soldier was both a warrior and a farmer (peasant), mobilized and demobilized at the same time. He was concurrently both on a peace and war footing.

The corporal, commander of 25 soldiers, lived on a croft under the same conditions as the private. The other commanders within the company, usually two sergeants, a lieutenant and a captain, all lived within the regimental area on specially assigned farms - the higher the rank, the larger the farm. Thus, the leaders lived among the soldiers and followed their undertakings on a continuing basis.

As one author puts it, "Directly from the the work in the fields and meadows, from the cobbler's table and tailor's shop, the soldier could hasten to his croft, grab the rifle and put on the uniform." In a few hours he would reach the company encampment area.

The unit soldiers and officers of the allotment army, consisting of both foot and horse soldiers, belonged to the area both socially and organizationally. So did also the navy allotment units, consisting of companies along the long Swedish coastline.

The Units

The smallest unit was the corporalship, usually 25 wards, each supporting one soldier, within a couple of adjacent parishes. A corporal commanded the unit. Two corporalships made up a section commanded by a sergeant. This section was more of a peacetime unit in order to facilitate the service at the ward level.

The company was made up of six corporalships. It was laid out so that communications would be as easy as possible in a time when the roads were not much more than trails with deep wagon ruts. Rapid communications were necessary for the soldiers to be able to gather as fast as possible at the company encampment area. The captain was the commander both on the battlefield and in the home territory during peacetime. The regiment consisted of eight companies with the colonel as the commander both at home and in the field.

The largest farm within the ward was called the main ward. It was responsible for the ward's obligations towards the soldier. The farmers within the ward appointed one ward master among themselves, usually for a year at a time on a rotating basis. He collected and paid the soldier's salary and was the ward's spokesman in dealing with the soldier and the military authorities.

The most important duties of the ward were to employ the soldier, arrange a croft for him, maintain it and pay his salary.

The Soldier

The crown demanded that "esteemed and tall men" be contracted.¹⁷ They had to be strong with no visible deformities. One instruction specified that a soldier should be, "Full to growth and alacrity - healthy and without secret diseases and weakness - without exception, have fully grown limbs, be of good disposition and esteem, be erect, healthy and have straight legs, also to have hair and at least the beginning of a beard. A long beard or pointed, upward-turned mustaches, were considered a sign of maturity and sometime when young man began to grow a beard his friends would ask him - 'Are you going to be a soldier?'"¹⁸

The captain, the company commander, also wanted the best possible soldiers, or as the saying went: "A good captain has good soldiers." The farmers on the other hand wanted to get away as cheaply as possible, since an inferior soldier did not demand as high a salary as a tall, strong and sought-after young man.

People seemed to think that the soldier ought to be taller than those around him. He was their protector, their tower of strength. He should stand head and shoulders above the congregation in church. In the late 1700s he had to have a height of 168 centimeters (67 inches). A hundred years later the height was lowered three centimeters and later to 163 centimeters together with a chest measurement of 88 centimeters (35 inches) and weight set at least of 55 kilograms (120 pounds). The measurements were lowered since it was difficult to find men to measure up and the government had to give in to the farmowners' demands to furnish young men of ordinary size.¹⁹

For the village and the community, the soldier as a rule played an important role. From the lake area of the province of Östergötland we have the following observation - "Nobody was talked about as much as the soldiers. They attended all festive occasions and were considered to be the best hosts, be it a wedding or a funeral. One could be sure that a soldier was behind every funny story told. They knew all the songs and when their supply ran out, they wrote new ones. The three soldiers were the highlight of the activities on the island."²⁰

The soldiers had a reputation for being happy, easy-going and thrifty men.

Many of them became the parish jack-of-all-trades. Concerning the navy allotment soldiers in Blekinge cities, it was rumored that, "They could do anything except nurse babies."²¹

The uniform and the service contributed to the creation of the soldier as a special type of man. But it was probably the selection process that played the biggest role. It was the enterprising and bold young men in top mental and physical condition who applied for the soldier's croft. The more careful and less dynamic stayed on the home farm, not daring to take the deciding step. It was far more difficult at that time than today to break away from one's own environment. Occupation and social status were often passed from father to son and any break from that tradition was likely to be criticized.

No doubt the soldier's abilities were developed during the training weeks that took place every year at the regimental training areas. There he learned how to keep himself, his uniform and his equipment in the best of shape. His training was largely in a different way of walking, "haughty and proud" behavior, with confidence in his movements. His straight back remained with him far into old age as the trademark of the soldier.

He was the favorite among the marriageable girls. And he usually won out over more earth-bound, grayish farm hands. An allotment soldier was rarely unmarried.

The soldier even had some advantages in the intellectual field. Up to the middle of the 1800s, he was the only one of the farming people who had to meet special intellectual requirements. At least, he had to be able to read and write his own name, otherwise the corporal or the captain would consign him to the school bench. Prior to the introduction of compulsory grade schools in Sweden in 1842 he often was the only one in the parish to possess these abilities other than the parish clergyman and the parish clerk. As a result of the regular religious services during the military drills, he was well versed in the catechism. "At the household examinations it was a real joy for eye and ear, when the soldier rose, stood at attention and read aloud and clear as well as answering the minister's questions."²²

His ability to write was often used by the village people - when the authorities had to be sent a petition, when probate inventories were made, etc. And what about the lovelorn young boy or girl who needed to have a letter written to the distant friend? The soldier was trusted even in these affairs of the heart.

To augment his salary he often used his skill in the trades and crafts to assist the people of the parish. Then he usually had to go from farm to farm since the law did not permit him to have any kind of a shop. That right was reserved for the master tradesmen in the surrounding cities. He could work for these masters as a journeyman or apprentice, but was not allowed to become a master himself.

Often the church was able to assist him by paying for minor assignments. He might serve as the parish clerk, lead the singing in the church, teach some children to read and write, become a sexton and gravedigger, or even serve as the church poker who, with a long pole, would awaken those who slumbered during the minister's sermon.

Names

The allotment soldiers, on land or at sea, often assumed a surname upon entering military service in order to avoid the inevitable mix-up that would follow when a typical company containing ten Anderssons, ten Erssons, ten Johanssons, ten Jönssons, ten Larssons, ten Olofssons, etc. would be created. The problem was compounded when it is realized that their baptismal names were similarly divided among such common names as Anders, Erik, Johan, Jöns, Lars, Olof, Sven, Pär and Petter. To avoid confusion, the troops were issued along, with clothing and weapons new names. These often alluded to military prowess, such as Modig (courageous), Tapper (brave), Stadig (sturdy) and Stark (strong), or some part of military arms, such as Svärd (sword), Spjut (spear), Lans (lance) and Sköld (shield). They may also have been given surnames which were derived from their home village or farm such as Täpp from Stora Täfte and Ekberg from Ekeby.²³

The Uniform

Several motives were probably behind the decision of a young man to shoulder the soldier's accouterments and served the ward, above all the ability to feed himself and his family. But in some cases vanity also played a role. He could appear, or maybe even show off, in his uniform at future parties, weddings and church services.

The uniform changed in appearance just like civilian clothing. Hardly any possibility to embellish it was left untouched. The 1700s saw armies and regiments vying with each other to dress up the soldier to look as manly and imposing as possible. Tall men were wanted and in order to give soldiers a still taller appearance a "feather cluster" was affixed to their hats. The shoulders were made broader with shoulder straps and shoulder boards and the chest enlarged by stripes called ribs.

The soldier usually had two uniforms, one for parades, part of which he would wear at drills and on the battlefield. The sponsors would usually keep this uniform under lock and key in the ward chest. The daily uniform would be a worn-out parade uniform to be used at the ward and on less solemn occasions. Finally worn-out garments with the insignias removed would be used in his daily work for the ward farmers. For this work the soldier was paid a reasonable wage plus some annual clothing, usually a coat, a pair of pants and two pairs of boots.²⁴

Home and Family

Many a young soldier looked toward the future with hope and confidence. After signing the contract with the wardsmen, a soldier climbed a few steps on the social ladder. He could deal with the village farmers with greater self-confidence. Also, in the game with the young girls he held a few aces. On Sundays he was able to show off his colorful uniform at the parish church and what young girl's heart could resist that! (My own mother loved to see her husband and sons in uniform during World War II). Perhaps he already had proposed to a girl, a servant maid or peasant daughter, and thus the proposed marriage was made easier by his new position. Possibly his intentions and hopes of marriage were a driving motive behind his soldier's application. He was able to offer his new wife a home, a soldier's croft, often located on the outskirts of the village, a home that would be theirs for twenty or thirty or more years so long as his health and strength would allow him to serve the ward. He had a potato patch, a barn, summer grazing and winter food for cow and goats. Sometimes he was given a cow, some sheep, and perhaps a pig when he first put on the uniform and thus could start with a full barn. With the animals he sometimes received some bedding from his sponsors - a blanket, a hide rug, some sheets and a pillow. Since the bed was fastened to the wall, little more furniture was needed. He probably borrowed some tools and made additional furniture for his bride, or he may have attended an auction in the neighborhood where he bought a folding table, some chairs and a dresser. And if his bride was lucky enough to bring some linen cloth and kitchen utensils, it did not take too long for them to look at a rosy future denied so many others of their class.²⁵

Before the soldier could marry both the parish clergyman and the captain had to have their say. For a long time and up until the end of the last century a soldier had to have permission from his superior before he could marry. The captain knew that an industrious and solid wife was an asset not only for the soldier but also the whole company. A diligent wife at the croft meant that that house was well kept and that the soldier was cared for so that he did not misuse liquor or take up other bad habits. A soldier's family's economic situation and standing in the community were largely dependent on the wife's practical ability and moral character.

For this reason the captain used his prerogative to check on all proposed marriages within his company. He wanted to know about the woman's past. Sometimes the soldier had to introduce her to his captain, but in any case the soldier had to submit a written request for permission to marry.

This strict control over marriage in the company eventually loosened but still as late as 1880, it was the law that "if a soldier intends to enter into matrimony, he shall report this to his captain."²⁶

The following very brief story of a soldier gives us an insight into his

private life: "On 13 February 1853 Gustaf Magnusson Friman, an honest and manly widower, was married to Johanna Petersdotter, an honest and godfearing woman. Friman is a soldier from Skruv soldier's croft in Herråkra Parish and his wife comes from the same place. He is a soldier in the Kalmar Regiment, belonging to the Oppvidinge Company. They had the following children - Johan Gustav, born 12 September 1853, followed by Helena, Anna Maria, Eva Christina, Sara, David Ansgarius, Per Samuel, Adam and Karl Fredrik. Friman died, being old and feeble, at the age of 48."²⁷ Here in a nutshell we find the soldier's loyalty to God, family and country as well as the names of his children, his own character and that of his wife. Many more details can be read from the notice but we leave that to further research.

Church Parades

As mentioned earlier, the church with its surrounding area was the center for the soldier belonging to that parish. This continued for at least two and a half centuries up to the the last decades of the 1800s. During those many years, the attendance at the church service on the Sabbath was a duty. The minister checked that nobody stayed away without a good reason and it was in his power to punish the non-attendant. The soldiers within the parish were supervised in their attendance by their military parish supervisor who was ordered to see that the soldiers appeared in the church orderly and neat. The soldier's responsibility to attend services in the parish church remained until the end of the last century.

The visits to the church on Sundays sometimes were combined with parades and training drills, examinations and inspections before the superiors while the parishioners looked on. From 1736 forward these drills began in April as soon as the ground was free of snow and continued until December.

The parades took on many forms, from a simple inspection of clothing and equipment to the ability of the soldiers within the parish to parade and march, sometimes involving several corporalships or an entire company which would pass in review before some officer on the church grounds. Toward the end of the 1700s the soldiers dressed in their colorful uniforms during the Sunday drills and this practice continued until the end of the church parades in the late 1800s.

Sometimes before the service at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings the soldiers dressed in "red scarves, powdered and with waxed mustaches" gathered to practice a "slow and proud way of marching."²⁸

Occasionally after the service the rural soldiers were lined up at the cemetery which surrounded the church and the warrant officers or the corporals would carefully inspect the clothing and record which soldiers were missing.

The parade usually closed with a test of the soldiers' knowledge of their handbook.

The Soldier's Handbook

In the middle of the 1700s the instructions to the soldier were printed in a little book which the soldiers had to carry in service and study until they knew it by heart. As the military system became more and more complicated, the handbook grew larger and larger.

The instructions may be divided into four parts. The first part consisted of solemn admonitions such as fearing God, honoring the King and serving the nation faithfully.

The second part contained some moral commands. In 1769 the soldiers were told to be "intrepid, faithful, sober, a little haughty when honored, avoid punishment, gain the respect of their superiors, maintain their health, support themselves and avoid idleness, which feeds disease and trouble." The soldiers were especially warned against the misuse of liquor.²⁹

The third part dealt with the care of the body and personal hygiene. Since the soldiers probably had the best possible instructions in these subjects, we get a general view of the standards in those days. The soldiers were admonished to be well clad and to change underwear and socks often so that uncleanness, sweat and vermin did not take over. On marches they were told to smoke only a little, and preferably to chew tobacco or a small piece of birch to prevent thirst, not to drink when overheated and then only pure water. They were not to lie down in the sun to sleep or with their stomachs resting on the ground. They were to wash their feet, but not when sweaty. On their free time they were to eat hot food at least every two or three days, not to take more than one drink, eat as often as they had the opportunity and sleep as often as they were free.³⁰

The fourth part contained instructions concerning the service, such as care for the rifle, to carry letters of the Crown, to make a living by work and to be neat and proper at the church parades. Soldiers were also instructed never to put lit pipes in their cartridge belts.

Discipline

The soldiers as a whole were law-abiding. Rarely was a soldier punished. The thoroughly kept company penal journals contain all judgments against company soldiers from a few hours of daylight arrest to long confinements on water and bread. In one regiment in the 1860s only one or two soldiers were sentenced in a year. At another company only 235 sentences were handed down during the half century 1820-1870. Among these were 25 lashes for drunkenness, ten lashes for disobeying orders, six days of confinement in the dark for selling liquor and the degradation of a corporal to a common soldier for drunkenness. Often

the cause for sentencing was drunkenness. Liquour played a big role in military life. It was thought that no army could function without liquour. A study shows that only about three percent of the soldiers were ever guilty of behavior severe enough for sentencing.³¹

The Croft

Three hundred years ago the Crown regulation stipulated that the croft should measure 16 feet in length, 14 feet in width and have a hall and a room. Other buildings belonging to the croft should include a barn for animals, 12 x 10 feet, a shed, 12 x 12 feet and a hay barn with a loft. During the 1700s it seems as if these regulations were followed. During the last century of the allotment system the instructions were eased and each province built crofts more in harmony with the rest of the area buildings. In Skåne, for example, all the buildings were united under one roof divided into a hall with a stove and a baking oven. The hall was 11 square meters in size, the living room twice the size and a sleeping section the same size as the hall. The remaining 33 square meters of space housed the animals, the winter fossil fuel and the harvest. The Skåne pattern was an exception as everywhere else several buildings took care of the foreign soldiers.³²

The main building of most of the 18,000 existing soldiers' crofts stood about six to eight feet in height. (People were shorter then!) The windows, usually two or three, were about two or three feet square, one of them hinged so that it could be opened to allow fresh air into the living quarters. In the taller crofts, often a low attic or crawl space was added which was entered from an inside stairway.

A special sign inscribed with the allotment soldier's company and number was hung outside, usually on the gable but was sometimes placed over the door if space allowed.

The croft was inspected now and then by representatives of the Crown, the sponsors, the regiment, and of course by the soldier himself. Agreements were made on repairs and who was to be responsible for what. Most sponsors were of course anxious to get away as cheaply as possible. Their saying was that it was not too important that the soldier got any use from the heat, only so that he got use of the smoke.³³

Major repairs were made about every thirty years, but eventually the frame buildings decayed so that the "entrance door was so low that even the 'old' woman and the 'kids' had to bend over double when using it" as the minutes of one inspection report stated.³⁴

From the inspection minutes we find details how the croft was built and furnished. The roofs were covered with birch bark and peat or with straw. Now and

then they needed to "be improved by five score of straw sheaves" or "be relaid and improved with 1 1/2 pounds of bark and 500 pieces of peat."³⁵ In the 1860s clay tiles began to be used on the roofs. Moss filled the spaces between the logs making up the timber walls. Much later the outer walls were clad with wooden boards. The crofts were mostly built on loose rocks. The crofts gradually shifted and thus had to be raised and straightened. In earlier centuries, in order to retain the heat, earth was placed around the croft as well as inside the house to keep out the floor draft.

The open fireplace with its stone wall and chimney was whitewashed. Sometimes iron stoves were used. The table and the benches, often fastened to the wall together with the bed(s), made up the simple furniture.

The Soldier's Salary

The pay of the allotment soldier varied from area to area. The total sum that each soldier received may have been about equal all over the whole country, but its kind varied. In most cases the croft was a part of the remuneration. An ordinary soldier's croft was supposed to yield two barrels of grain, two loads of hay, and some straw. This amount the soldier was guaranteed by the sponsors, and if the yield was less, as in many cases, the sponsors furnished the balance.

Sometimes other items in kind were part of the salary, items for wear and tear, for eating and drinking. It is not certain how these items were included. Perhaps during periods when it was difficult to sign up soldiers young men were enticed to join with a gift of a pair of leather breeches or some extra malt for the Christmas ale (or stronger drink), or perhaps a piece of pork. Once they were given, these gifts often became customary and traditional.

Part of the salary may also have been the grazing of the cow on the sponsors' land and a free ride to the miller once or twice a year. It is estimated that in 1860, nearly all soldiers received firewood from their sponsors, that one half received free rides to the miller and about one fourth received some hay and straw.

The sponsors had to pay the the soldier a special bonus when signing the contract. The free market system decided the amount. It was paid out over a period of time to prevent the newly appointed soldier from absconding with his bonus, which sometimes could be rather sizeable.

The contract was negotiated between the sponsors and the soldier and at times the bargaining could be rather sharp. Some contracts from the 1700s have been preserved. They are simple documents, as seen from the following dated 1792.³⁶

Contract between Ward # 44 and Jan Jansson of Brunnby, a farmhand

1. We give him a salary of 300 daler.
2. We give him one cow.
3. We give him one sheep.
4. We give him one pig.
5. We give him a field yielding five barrels along each of two roads.
6. We give him meadowland as of old.
7. We give him clothes from hand to foot.
8. We give him six loads of firewood annually.
9. We give him eight pennies at each regimental encampment.
10. We give him two daler a day in addition to the food while on the march.

This contract was signed by six sponsors.

In the 1800s these contracts became more elaborate. The contract had to be approved by the regimental commander and the governor of the province.

At time of discharge, which most often came after about thirty years of service, when the soldier had reached the age of between fifty and sixty years, he received a small pension, more or less a token than substance.

Often the retiring soldier would receive some help from his ward sponsors to start his new life. He was allowed to cut the timber in their forests for his new cottage, or he might keep the new land he had cleared during his tour as a soldier.

The sponsors would also feel some responsibility toward the soldier's widow and fatherless children, but the widow would sometime solve her problem by remarrying, very often another soldier, sometimes the successor of her first husband. She could thus stay on in the croft.

Even though the soldier was retired at the time of his death, he was honored by a military funeral. His companions were ordered to parade at the grave in their finest uniforms, carry his remains and fire the funeral volley.

This colorful scene was a most proper ending to these most colorful individuals. To these men, of which I was one for ten years serving from private to officer, I show my respect by standing erect, as so many times before in reverent attention and by raising my hand in a grateful and comradely salute.

Notes

¹Special thanks are expressed to Karl Ib of the National Archives in Copenhagen, Section III, the Military Archives and to Alf Åberg, retired director of the Swedish Military Archives in Stockholm, for their kind assistance.

Swedish American Genealogist

² Moberg, Vilhelm, *Raskens* (Stockholm 1927).

³For additional information on the Danish military see Jørgen Teisen, "Danish Military and Maritime Records - Their Place in Genealogy," (World Conference on Records and Genealogical Seminar, 1969), Area E-12.

⁴ Coldevin, Axel, *Vårt Folks Historie* (Oslo 1963), p. 204.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J.Krøier & J. Hinge, *Den Danske Underofficer* (Copenhagen 1916), p.127.

⁷ Vaupell, Otto, *Den Dansk-Norske Hærs Historie* (Copenhagen 1872), p. 449.

⁸Rockstroh, K.C., *Fortællinger af Second Batallions Historie 1657-1907* (manuscript, *Rigsarkivet*, Section III, Copenhagen), p. 17.

⁹ For additional information on the Norwegian Military, see Jan H. Olstad, "Military Records of Norway," (World Conference on Records and Genealogical Seminar, 1969, Area E-8.,

¹⁰ Coldevin, *Vårt Folks Historie*, p. 163.

¹¹ Lunde, Gunnar, *Bø-Soga*, I, (Bø, Norway 1972), p. 216.

¹² Coldevin, *Vårt Folks Historie*, p. 162.

¹³ Lunde, *Bø-Soga*, I, p. 213.

¹⁴ Coldevin, *Vårt Folks Historie*, p. 161.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 163.

¹⁶ Kumm, Elfred, *Indelt soldat och rotebonde* (Stockholm 1949), p. 10.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

²¹ Ibid., p. 202.

²² Ibid., p. 204.

²³ Johansson, Carl-Erik, *Cradled in Sweden* (Logan, Ut 1977), p. 226.

²⁴ Kumm, *Indelt soldat och rotebonde*, p. 36.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Herråkra Parish Register, 1853.

²⁸ Kumm, *Indelt soldat och rotebonde*, p. 55.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

³¹ Ibid., p. 150.

³² Ibid., p. 166.

³³ Ibid., p. 176.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 156.