

The horse fight at Vorbasse, 29 February 1864

Introduction

In April 1991, the then Boye's Auction House held an international auction in London. Among the effects was a very large collection of Lineol and Elastolin figures as well as some paintings. As catalog number 853A, an oil painting by FKK Hansen Reistrup with the Equestrian Duel at Vorbasse on 29 February 1864 as a motif was sold. The painting measures 175 x 75 cm and is signed KHR 1911. The auction house's estimate was GBP 5,000-6,000.

I do not have detailed information about the outcome of the auction, so it is not known whether the painting was sold, to whom and, if so, at what price. The painting is quite impressive and I am showing here a reproduction of the illustration in the auction catalogue.

The painting



The story

With a source in *Historical report on 5' Dragoon regiment - Published on the occasion of the regiment's 250th anniversary* by lieutenant colonel E. Leschly, Randers 1929, the following can be stated about the situation that forms the starting point for the painting:

"... During the stay here [in the area west of Vejle/south of Jellinge] morale was raised by the intelligence about dragoon at the 6th Dragoon Regiment's 4th Squadron Niels Kjeldsen's heroic battle at Blaakjær Skov on 28 February 1864 and about the cavalry duel at Vorbasse on 29 February 1864 - probably our most beautiful cavalry exploit in the 2nd Schleswig War - where the squadron Moe (5./ 3rd Dragoon Regiment) during a horse parade was ambushed by 2 Prussian squadrons of the 1st Westphalian Hussar Regiment. First smaller parts of the squadron and later the main force of the eska drone attacked the enemy hussars recklessly and for the most part on bare horse. On this occasion, Second Lieutenant W. Saurbrey and Warden Jøns distinguished themselves in particular. In both of these affairs, the Danish dragoons showed their excellent use of weapons and earned the respect of the enemy.

After the cavalry duel at Vorbasse, Squadron Moe needed a few days' rest and was replaced on 3 March as patrol command in Vesteregnet by 3./5. Dragoon Regiment, under Master Printzen. After a few days' rest, Eskadron Moe moved west again and united with Eskadron Printzen to form a "left patrol corps" under the command of Ritmaster Moe. ..."

On the far left of the painting, two of the mentioned persons can be seen who attacked on horseback - an officer (with field cap and light coat) and a dragoon. Although the rendering does not show "a large part on bare horseback", the detail is included.

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A few observations about organization, uniforming and what the horses were exposed to

Organization

With regard to the organization of the 5th Dragoon Regiment in the 2nd Schleswig War, it appears that the regiment that goes to war consists of five squadrons, of which the 5th was established in October 1863. Commanding officers, privates and horses from the other squadrons formed the cadre. Older personnel and newly purchased horses were distributed equally among all five squadrons; the horses were almost all unprepared. On 24 December 1863, the regiment was ordered to set up the 6th Squadron, which was done according to the same principle - "... the other squadrons again had to give up personnel and horses and, as a replacement for this, received older less routine ready, partly ill-equipped, just called-up people as well as new purchased, quite raw horses. It goes without saying that this expansion, which was supposed to strengthen the cavalry, rather worked in the opposite direction. ..."

By the end of January 1864, all six squadrons are at full strength and, after an intensive training period, are reasonably cooperative. A squadron consisted of approximately 130 men:

1 riding master, squadron leader
2 lieutenants 1 warden 1
quartermaster 3 watch masters
2 corporals

120 (approximately) corporals and privates, in addition to trumpeters, farriers, saddle makers, etc.

Uniforming "The

provision of uniform cases was largely deficient. However, most summoned dragoons had both cloak and helmet, but that was also the end of their uniform. Even a few months after the outbreak of the war, there were people at the squadrons who wore civilian trousers tucked into their long boots, civilian coats or Icelandic sweaters under their cloaks.

The rider's saber was not infrequently carried in a piece of rope around the waist. The deficiencies were gradually remedied by deliveries from the Munderingsdepotet in Copenhagen, but it was slow - very slow."

What the horses were exposed to

During the retreat from Schleswig towards Kolding, the 5th Dragoon Regiment, on the morning of February 8, 1864, marches from Aabenraa to Haderslev - 30 kilometers at a trot along roads covered in snow and ice. The regiment is then ordered across Christiansfeld towards Kolding, which is reached at nine o'clock. About the march from Haderslev to Kolding it says:

"... It was a very hard trip. During the rough riding in the morning on the slippery road, many of the horses had lost one or more shoes, after which the horn on the hooves was worn quite quickly, so that the hooves bled. No one in the marching force could deliver an emergency blow, as the farriers were on the train, which had been sent in advance. In order to spare the horses, they were ordered to be dismounted and dragged, and now the dragoons in great cloaks dragged themselves and their tired horses off along the road in double column with open links. Two bloody streaks formed on the white snow straight from Haderslev to Kolding, which were only reached on the 8th, at 7 o'clock in the afternoon. ..."

As if to complete the torture, there were no orders as to what the regiment was to do when it reached Kolding, or where it was to quarter. Thus it lasted on Kolding's streets until 2 o'clock in the morning - in thick and dense snow! Only then was the order to go into quarters around Gudsø, approximately 10 kilometers north-east of Kolding.

Fortunately, the regiment met everywhere with great sympathy from the population and "... in villages as well as in towns that were close to nesting - the residents brought the tired dragoons buckets of hot milk or hot coffee and wheat bread. During the long waiting time on the streets of Kolding, the residents also showed great kindness to the regiment, yes, many even brought hot food out to the people."

Per Finsted

¹ In 1932, the 3rd and 5th Dragoon Regiments were combined under the name Juyske Dragoon Regiment.