

Contemporary uniform descriptions based on Bræstrup's left behind papers 1813-1814

(Chakoten 1970/3)

Introduction

Contemporary descriptions are an invaluable source when the subject is old-time uniforms. Bræstrup's [1\)](#) [—](#) "Efterlatte papierer 1813-1814" contains a number of descriptions of the troops that went out during the battles in Holstein in 1813 and 1814.

Extracts of the papers have been published in the magazine Chakoten 1970 and this article is reproduced below.

It is a well-known fact that a picture speaks louder than many words, so I have inserted individual vignettes from the website's illustrations to make the article a little less heavy, and at the end I bring links to the pictures of relevance to the topic and the period that we in today has on our website.

Kaare Myltoft

Bræstrup

About the Russian and Hanseatic troops

[pages 40-43] "The Cossacks, with whom I have longed so much to make their acquaintance, look like the worst scumbags imaginable, street robbers at best, but not at all dangerous to soldiers, which, however, they should be in the highest degree. They are usually of medium size and rather ugly, with a very telling sometimes wild face and blond hair. They usually wear gag mustaches and many - especially the older ones - beards of considerable length. Their dress is the most complex and mixed that one can imagine.



Russian Cossacks

Only the Don Cossacks are well and fairly uniformly dressed, mostly in a short blue shirt with a sailor's cut

with a red collar and notices and long blue trousers, like the artillery officers' Ulan trousers, with a red stripe down the sides. There they carry, around their waists, a cartridge bag, which is usually of cast silver with many figures on it, about the size of our cavalry officers, but of a somewhat different shape, in a black shoulder strap, which at a short distance from each other is studded with all kinds of figures of silver, much like on harnesses. Sometimes a silver field case instead of the cartridge case hangs from this strap. They all, almost without exception, have the usual Russian caps, like the stranded Russian sailors, it is a cloth cap without a shade like a hat-pool edged at the bottom with a cloth of a different color.

The color of the clothes is often difficult to find out with the usual Cossacks, as they seem to be as little afraid of dirt on the clothes as of any other unpleasantness. The Don Cossacks usually wear boots, but none have spurs. The common Cossacks have all sorts of costumes, French, Portuguese, and God knows what other uniforms of all colors and cuts, civilian ball gowns, which are probably taken from their friends the French, sheepskin furs and other furs or coarse clothes, which seem to be made at home by themselves. . They also have cloaks of all shapes, which are probably mostly booty, some are also seen from some clothing such as rope-work carpets, which is probably Cossack fashion.

On the legs, they are just as fantastically dressed with foreign pants, canvas, leather, Ulan and any other kind of trousers you can imagine. On the feet have some boots, but most shoes.

One finds so little evidence of uniformity not only in the whole collection, but also in the individual person, that one often sees a Cossack with a boot on one leg and a shoe on the other leg, or with a stocking on one leg and the other bare or wrapped with laser or buttoned into a conquered boot.



Russian Cossacks in battle with Danish light dragoons

In addition to the saber, they all have a 5-6 cubit long lance equipped at the end with an iron point usually tied with rope or sometimes with a bayonet. With this weapon, which just doesn't look very durable, they would have to be extremely dangerous, as they would have to have an extraordinary force in swinging it and hitting whatever spot they wanted. Some also have a long gun hanging on their back in a strap, which is probably mostly loot from the French. In their leather belt hangs their kautschu, a whip that they all have. Many Cossacks have a small light blue ribbon on their chest, which is supposed to be an orderly ribbon, and several wear St. The Order of George with a ribbon of yellow, white or other light colour.

The horses are in good condition, but as unremarkable, about as the most unkempt and sleepy Laaland or Zealand farmer's horse. They have long necks and carry their heads in a straight line with the body, which as well as their angular shape, especially of the cross, makes them easily recognizable among others. The riders sit a good half a cubit above the horse's back, as the saddle is like a donkey saddle and is also covered with a thick leather pad and sometimes even with skin on top.

The Cossacks sit on the horse with their legs almost like art-equestrians and dangle during the ride with them towards the horse's sides. Down the sides of the horse, large leather flaps extend from the saddle. With the body sitting

the Cossacks above. They lead the horse without bars. All leather clothing looks miserable, it is often tied together in several places.

I have not been able to detect any difference between the officers and the privates."

[page 217] "Among the Russian troops, the national guard was especially distinguished by its hideous pig-like appearance. It generally consists of small people, some only two cubits high, of very ugly physiognomy and ugly build. Their dress is a hooded dress, which reaches to the knees and is fastened together with a leather thong, a pair of long breeches, and a square two-quarter-high hat without a shade at the top, with an A on the forehead. Dress, breeches, and hat are of coarse white-grey cloth. Those old enough to wear long beards, and their hair, like that of all Russians, is long and thick. They are ugly, and their impurity renders their appearance most repulsive.

The Cossacks, though more irregularly dressed, are generally handsome to them. The National Guard has mostly French rifles and does not have to exercise as hard as their maladroit appearance suggests. Those who belong to the land storm have only girls."



Hanseatic Cavalry

[page 44] "The Russian hussars who are in this region, if I remember correctly, the Illumowsky regiment, are on the whole exceedingly fine people in a very tasteful scarlet uniform with white cords and with gray woolen trousers with red edges and gray Russian hats also with red brim Their horses are very large, strong, and in good condition, but of a different heavier creature than ours.

The artillery is dark green with a helmet with yellow plates in front. It looks pretty good. The cannons, which I did not see, were supposed to be painted green.

The Hanseatic cavalry is very well dressed and in general equipped and armed in the Cossack fashion, so that they have everything right down to the cartouche and the beard, but I do not know whether they also have the qualities of the interior and the tenacity. However, they carry banners like our Ulans on their lances and the Hanseatic cockade, white with a red cross. The uniform is a gray or dark green half-coat with a light blue collar with gold buttonholes and blue edges on the trousers and around the hat."

About the French troops



Polish launchers in Hamburg, 1813

[page 79] "The train which came through the Mühlenthor leading from Hamburg was opened, as it were, by a strong dragoon patrol. Then came some lance corporals with their carbines arranged in such a way that, when necessary, they could cock and fire them. Then followed about a escadron lanciers They consisted of Poles, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Germans, etc., and were fairly well-grown people.

The uniforms were dark blue, Ulan trousers with red stripes, dark blue shirt with color de chair fringes cut like our Ulans, square Polish hats, Ulanlanders with blue and white flags, sabers and pistols.

The horses had lambskin coats with the wool on the outside. Their trumpeters were dressed in paillette yellow.

After them came 50 chasseurs a cheval - the remnants of the 1000-strong 28th regiment on the march to Russia, Italians with hideous bandit faces and a not pretty dark green uniform. Now followed battalions of the 12th, 33rd, 35th, 57th, 61st, 82nd and one more regiment. These were all in dark blue uniforms except the tambours, which were dark green, everywhere studded with cords with an N and an eagle in succession. The rebates and the feathers are so different that I haven't quite figured out the difference yet. This much I think I only know, that the grenadiers, who otherwise wear no distinction, have red collars and feathers, and the voltigeurs yellow collars and feathers. The shoes are white cloth trousers with long boots, with some white canvas trousers.

On the chakot all have yellow, not at all tasteful plates with an eagle at the top and in the middle of the plate the regiment's no. Each soldier carries the Emperor's cipher. In general, twice on each dress lapel and once on the cartridge case.

Their music only consisted of some very dull-sounding, but fairly well-beaten drums at each battalion, the other music they say they stayed in Russia."

About the Swedish troops

[page 210] "The Swedish military had a very hideous appearance. The infantry, who wear round hats with a brass ring around the brim close above the brim and yellow feathers, and gray cloaks with short, drooping lapels, seemed to me to have quite an appearance and propriety as citizen militia, and the officers with their long blue ill-sewn overcoats with large yellow buttons like the artisans of our small towns in their Sunday dress. The grenadiers with their round cocked hats with a brim studded with horse hair as on our dragoon helmets and grenades on the front, and the hunters did not look much better . The people themselves are also far from beautiful."



French Infantry, 1813-15

Notes:

1) Kristian Jakob Kosmus Bræstrup was born in 1789 and died in 1870

He took part in 1813 as an auditor in the campaign in Holstein, in 1821 became an assessor in Copenhagen's police court, in 1823 deputy chief of police and in 1833 chief of police.

He resigned as councilor of the secret conference and was sent as a Danish envoy to Athens, where the Danish prince Vilhelm had been crowned king (Georg I).

In 1864 he was appointed chief president in Copenhagen, a position he retained until his death.

From November 1864 to April 1865 he participated in the peace negotiations after the war in 1864 and in the period April November 1865 he was Minister of Justice.

His *Surviving Papers from 1813-14* were published in 1894.

Source: *Nordisk familjebok konversationslexikon och realencyklopedi, 1905*

2) The illustrations here come from many different sources and are based on many different original sources from many places.

Therefore, they give a very different picture from Bræstrup's, without it detracting from the value of his "snapshot".