

The non-commissioned officer's baton - a status symbol!

The following article from Chakoten has been carefully edited with regard to spelling and wording, although no changes have been made in the quoted sections.

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In our free-born age, where the military existence of an ordinary soldier is and should be in every respect characterized by the esteem and care of the state and the commanders, it may perhaps be of interest to look back at the time when for the teams of the army's "underclasses" was essential inferior, to the pedantic, brutal and inefficient period of the "boot era".

In this era - right up to the end of the autocracy - there existed in the army a mark of distinction which in our days would be contested as such, namely a cane for both officers and non-commissioned officers, and yet it was at one time an indispensable accessory to the uniform, a sign of dignity and also a regulated beating instrument!

The fact that a commanding officer carries, in addition to his personal weapon, some form of cane as a sign of his dignity and right to command is an ancient phenomenon.

All the way back to Roman times, the relationship can certainly be observed. The Roman centurion's cane was known and feared by his subjects, who often had to feel it on the backs of their heads. It can be followed internationally in different forms through time up to the period in the Danish army which will be dealt with here.

The fact that it was allowed to beat the backward with a stick is not the most interesting thing in this connection. A lot has been written about this, and it was in the spirit of the times that you kept everyone under you emphatically based on the principle that you " *should fear your immediate superior and despise your immediate inferior*". Frederik the Great of Prussia himself said that "*it is impossible to raise children and soldiers without hacking*".

The remarkable thing is that the cane was actually handed over by the company commander when he was appointed corporal!

Not much is concretely known about this cane, although it is occasionally mentioned in the memoir literature. In its original version - ie around the middle of the 18th century - it was a cane cane, later, as far as can be seen, a hazel cane.

Some accounts could indicate that the prevailing tendency of all soldiers throughout the ages for unregulated decoration also applied to the cane, as it was often equipped with a silver button like a real walking stick, which was apparently tolerated.

In the Danish army at the time of Frederik VI, the cane was worn buttoned in a leather strap or "wrist strap" on the chest between the 2nd and 3rd button, when it was not in use as a means of punishment, pointing stick, etc.

We have an account from a Danish officer who started his career as a corporal around 1780. He writes i.a. about the cane: "*...I was not a little proud of my new advantages, namely the corporal's cane and the silver epaulet (non-commissioned officers wore an epaulette on one shoulder), and I adorned myself with great care to please myself and others. I had after all, for fifty years stood under the cane which I now carried myself.*

That is why it was so good to see himself honored by the soldiers, respected by the citizens and called "monsieur" by the officers. A few days ago, officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers alike had said "he" or "you".

me; now they said "They". - I had great thoughts about my worth as a corporal. It is strange what significance it has for a person when you have previously lived under constant pressure and unceasing threats of beatings, if you now enter another circle where you become treated properly and can feel like a human being. The non-commissioned officers do not receive a beating, but when they have done something bad, they are "wetted", i.e. they receive blows from the flat saber blade, but when they have committed any crime, they are first demoted and then punished as privates according to the articles of war. It is considered more honorable and more chivalrous to be flogged than flogged, although it hurts more and is more dangerous to the health, but this prejudice is now ingrained in all European armies."

The account is in full accord with the Subordination Ordinances of 1767 and 1792, which clearly set limits to floggings in the army, yet allow them in a certain sense and extent: "... Every superior, who ... not by the inferior ...if immediate obedience and respect are shown, We hereby give power to ensure that service order and discipline can always be observed, on the spot, however, with the permission of the supreme commander, who is present, to correct his inferior, a soldier with some rap with a cane, a non-commissioned officer with the flat of the blade, and an officer, from the cornet or ensign down to the lieutenant-colonel with reprimand or with arrest. However, such correction must in no way resemble a real punishment."

A non-commissioned officer who had offended the crew could, as punishment, be ordered to "lay down the cane" for some time, what. which has probably been in line with whether the commanding officer today was instructed to wear the underpants outside the uniform trousers. It should be noted that officers during the same period also carried a cane. It was, however, a rather long cane with silver or gold knobs, which was used exclusively as a walking stick.

The cane played a significant role during the punishment known as the "spiky root punishment".

Here, too, there is a first-hand account from a participant in Gothersgade's exercise house around the year 1800:

After the court-martial had sentenced the culprit to taproot, the profoss (judicial sergeant) went with a few privates to one of the state forests to "cut taproots", i.e. young, strong but flexible shoots of the hazel tree. At the place of execution the regimental adjutant divided the command and handed it to the premier-major, who now drew his sabre, and the delinquent with handcuffs on was led forward in front of the parade.

The auditor read out his crime (which could often be small enough) and the order handed down by the court-martial. While he was stripped naked to the hips, and his field cap was pulled down over his neck to protect it from any blows that might stray, a larger piece of ginger was placed in his mouth as a tonic.

At the major's command, the gangways were opened with 6 steps, 1 gangway went around, and within the avenue thus created, the culprit was led by 4 non-commissioned officers. 2 of these walked in front with rifles crossed behind to prevent him from advancing faster than 90 paces per minute (the parade march). The other 2 walked somewhat behind, in order, when they had reached the end of the ranks, to form the lead during the return march. Back and forth was once.

Then was commanded "**Rifle in left arm! Distribute the roots!**" and then "**Execution Begin!**" at which command the pipes and tambourines posted on the right wing began the "Execution March," and the NCOs with the delinquent set in motion, the culprit often pushed forward with the rifle pipes by the 2 NCOs walking behind. Each man delivered a blow during the march past, and in order that they should not "put their fingers between", the men behind the ranks were watched by the regimental and battalion adjutant, who, accompanied by non-commissioned officers with the indispensable hazel stick, did not spare vigorous encouragement.

After arriving at the center of the ranks, the music on the right wing was replaced by a similar one on the left wing, and the march continued back and forth for 15 or 20 minutes, while the sergeant-at-law had enough to do with distributing new "roots" to the men.

After the execution of the sentence, the handcuffs were removed, and the sufferer had to, according to the regulations thank the major for "merciful punishment". Already during the first advance, dark red streaks appeared on the shoulders, and by the 2nd and 3rd laps, blood trickled everywhere on the back. Later, not infrequently, pieces of skin and shreds of flesh fell to the ground. After a cloak had been thrown over the bloody body, the condemned man was taken to the hospital, where he usually had to undergo a painful operation to remove the roots. After discharge, the person in question was finally taken to the detention center to endure the 10 to 20 days on water and bread, with which the capital punishment was usually associated. This punishment was only abolished in 1835 and replaced by a greater number of canings upon conviction. However, this punishment could not be applied to non-commissioned officers who had been awarded the saber of honor or the ribbon of honor for diligence and skill in drill schools.

Whipping was finally abolished in the army around 1850, but it must have been several years in the slow-moving department before the ban was pushed through. After all, spokespersons and climate committees did not exist in those days.

Thus, it is known that in Frederik VII's first years the ban was circumvented by the fact that the most reactionary non-commissioned officers, who were now no longer allowed to carry a cane, hid a good, smacking hazel cane in the barrel of the gun, from which it could be quickly retrieved when nature overcame the discipline .

Expensive is the event when, at a parade, the giddy Frederik VII, in a discussion with an old veteran of the Anglo-Saxon wars, claimed that the Danish army was now so advanced that you no longer beat the men.



*The author of the article
wearing the uniform of command
sergeant in the infantry
M/ 1842 from the 1st Life Regiment of Foot.*

The attire is a red, double-breasted dress with white buttons and lining, light blue collar, woolen epaulettes and cuffs. White edging.

The insignia are 3 white wool spars, above that a button (according to the Army Act of

1867 rank insignia for the new rank "sergeant major"). Light blue trousers and black shoes or boots.

Black leather chakot with chinstrap, white "sun" with a "1", red/white cockade and white pompon.

The 20-year badge of honor for non-commissioned officers is worn on the chest.

The armament is "*saber for infantry non-commissioned officers and hautboisters M/1831*" with yellow/red woolen tassel in white lacquer bands.

The non-commissioned officer's baton hangs from a leather strap around the right wrist.

Photo: Søren Kristensen.

The old man knew better and bet the king a penny that it still happened.

The king accepted the bet, but at the same time asked how it should be settled, since - as the old man could see - there were no sticks with the non-commissioned officers.

The veteran asked permission to command the parade for a minute, which he obtained, and at his command "**Guns at ... foot! Turn ... the guns! ... down!**" rattled the hazel-stocks out of the rifle-barrels of several non-commissioned officers, and the bet was won, while the veins swelled with fury in the forehead of the temperamental king.

As a small appendage, we should mention the small, abandoned, purposeless and unregulated leather stick or stick, which came into fashion among a number of officers after the liberation in 1945, popularly called the "bladder" or "complex stick".

It was not known in our army before 1945, but through the extensive cooperation with British officers in the post-war period, it became known, and someone has obviously felt attracted to it. Today, however, it is rare to see.

This cane has never been regulated, but as a kind of tacit law it was usually only carried from captain (major) upwards, but could (and can) in and of itself be carried by corporals and sergeant group commanders with equal right.

So perhaps the historical line had been kept up to date with some right!

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