

Boatsmen in the Swedish Army Fleet during the War of Gustavus III

Marcus Lepola 2019

The Allotment system

A multitude of different kinds of soldiers and service men were among the crew on board the Swedish army fleet during the late 18th century. The motley crew included able seamen (Swe. kofferdie matros), enlisted seaman, volunteers, ship's boys, boatsmen, artillery men as well as army soldiers. Carpenters as well as the officer's servants (Swe. dräng) were also found on ship's rosters as well as barber surgeons and military priests.



Swedish boatsman's attire in the late 18th century by B. Jacobsen. Swedish Maritime Museum.

The system of recruitment in Sweden at the time was unique compared to other countries. Soldiers were recruited through the "allotment system". This system of recruitment was first envisioned by the king Gustav Wasa when was dealing with peasant uprisings in Småland during

the Dacke War of 1542. During the campaign the king began to realise the military potential common people could offer. This led him to establish a system whereby soldiers were recruited on a voluntary basis by offering them a croft and a piece of land. The system evolved over time, and in 1619 Gustav II Adolf issued a decree whereby one in ten men were to be conscripted. Lists of local men were maintained by the clergy.

In addition to soldiers and cavalry for the army, the expanding Swedish navy also required boatsmen (Swe. *Båtsman*). In the 1634–1640 period, twelve Boatsmen's Companies were established in coastal parishes. Southwestern Finland constituted the Company of Southern Finland, which included Pargas and Kimito. The Company of Åland included Nagu, Korpo, Rimito (Rymättylä) and Tövsala (Taivassalo). The Finnish companies were later merged into the Navy Company of Åland and Southern Finland. Farms in this area were required to form a type of consortium called *rote*, each corresponding to a minimum of two *mantal* (a unit of land) and responsible for funding one *rote* boatswain. The most suitable farm was chosen as the *rote* farm where the boatswain's croft was usually set up. The croft was considered to be joint property of the village.



A boatsman's croft, unknown Swedish artist 1910. The red paint is a later addition, the cottages in the 1800s were of unpainted timber.

Boatswain's salary

According to the 1690 decree, each boatsman received an annual pay of 2 riksdaler and 3 shillings. The land belonging to the croft had to produce two barrels of grain each year. It also included a meadow that produced two loads of hay as animal feed. The *rote* farmers were obliged to help the wives of boatsmen when the men were away fighting in a war or stationed elsewhere. The size of the cottage was strictly regulated. It had to be eight ells from corner to corner, including a porch. The croft also included a granary, barn and a shed for two cows.

Boatswains received three types of assistance as part of their salary from the rote. The first assistance package consisted of an overcoat, a suitcase, a hammock and a rug, and it had to last three years of service. A second package was issued each time a boatswain was sent on a mission that lasted three months or longer. This package included a jumper, a vest, trousers, a scarf, a hat, one pair of leather boots, two pairs of woolly socks and two shirts. The third package consisted of one pair of boots and socks, and it was issued for missions lasting between three weeks and two months. The rote farms sometimes complained about the cost of equipping the boatswains, especially when a single rote had to supply several boatswains in a short space of time if the soldiers died in quick succession. During times of war the rote also had to provide a second, auxiliary boatswain for the service of the king.

140.	Eri Ericson Anghar	Commencid i Åbo.
140.	And. Grelsson Blåberg.	1790. d. 5. Febr. ändogs öfvingen Ant. Henricsson 30. år gamm, (mal infod obefaren). W
141.	Svahn.	1790. d. 5. Febr. hid bruns post- fordubt Träskblad för ordinarie Wagant.
144.	Hag. Johansson Träskblad.	1790. d. 5. Febr. ändogs Blå- maus och Henr. Henricsson Här general infod obefaren. W

Åland and Southern Finland Company roster from the year 1790. The Boatsman's roster was updated annually. Boatsmen from Pargas parish were numbered 136- 178. The number in the right indicate extra auxiliary boatsmen recruited during times of war. According to the roster the auxiliary boatsman nr 144 Träskblad was promoted to ordinary boatsman on the 5th of February as the ordinary boatsman nr 141 Svahn had died on board the hospital frigate Lodbrock during the previous year.

The boatsmen that served onboard the Army fleet during the war of Gustavus III came from the following boatsmen's companies:

Roslag's 2 Companies; Östergötland Company; Tjust Company; Bohuslän's 2 Companies; Åland and Southern Finland Company; Gotland's 2 Companies; The Cities of Skåne's Company; Norrland's 2 Companies; Södermanlands' 2 Companies; Småland Company; Västergötland Company; Öland's 2 companies; The Stockholm City Company; Uppstäderna's Company.

The Åland and Southern Finland Company was the only company providing boatsmen from Finland. The region is predominately Swedish speaking which is probably a contributing reason

why recruitment was limited to this area. People in this region were also used travel by boat since childhood and were more adept at sea.

The boatsmen from Finland and Åland were stationed at the fortress of Sveaborg outside Helsingfors and served therefore in the Army fleet. The ships of the line were as rule manned by boatsmen from Swedish parishes. The number of boatsmen onboard a Swedish ship of the line would amount to about an hundred as the total crew would amount to more than 500. The proportion of boatsmen in the Army fleet was proportionately smaller. A large archipelago frigate such as the Styrbjörn would have less than 20 boatsmen among the 400 members of crew. The composition of the crew varied depending on the size of the ship. The crew on board the smaller Army fleet vessels such as the Gunsloop nr 10 in 1790 was as following:

Ship's command Ensign Stolpe and Artillery officer Frimodig. 2 able seaman, 2 boatsmen, 4 artillery soldiers and 46 regular soldiers. In total 56 crew members.

Life at sea

A boatsman was foremost a skilled sailor who assisted the ship's commander in sailing and maintaining the vessel. The boatsmen were as rule divided in to groups of 8 forming a unit called a "Matlag". This unit received an equal share of daily provisions which they had to cook themselves, often on land by an open fire. The amount and quality of the provisions varied but here is an example of what provisions a team of 8 boatsmen could receive during a day.

Breakfast

1 Mark (425 grams) of salted herring and 4 "Virgins" (Swe. Jungfru – 8,2 cl) of strong spirits.

Lunch

3 Marks of Pork, 3 "Quarters" (Swe. Kvarter – 32,7 cl) and 1 ½ Virgin of peas, 3 Virgins of oatmeal and 4 Virgins of strong spirits.

Dinner

16 "Sinkers" (Swe. Lod – 13,3 grams) of butter, 5 Quartes and 1 Virgin of barleycorn and 4 Virgins of strong spirits.

Boatsmen in the Swedish Army fleet did not have a specific uniform during the War of Gustavus III. A uniform was apparently issued to some boatsmen onboard the ship of the line but in general the clothing which was provided by the parish rote's was not at this time standardized and was made locally.

Boatsmen's crofts

If a boatsman was lost at sea or died, he had to be replaced within the year. The family of the previous boatsman had no right to the croft and had to leave. Parish priests seem to have been

involved in the process of providing the widow with a new potential husband and means of livelihood. Often the widows and children would move to another village or even to another parish to remarry another boatsman and settle at his croft.

The boatsmen were given new official names as they were assigned to a croft. At the time ordinary people did not have surnames and used patronyms. This made it difficult for the commanders to single out soldiers, especially as Johansson and Henriksson were fairly common patronyms. Therefore all soldiers and boatsmen received surnames which could sometimes be imaginative and humorous such as Flower (Swe. Blomma), Seabird (Swe. Sjöfågel) or Flagpole (Swe. Flaggstake). The surname was connected to the croft and a boatsman replacing the previous one would have the same name regardless of family ties.



The remains of a 18th century boatsman's cottage on the Island of Attu in Pargas. Boatsmen with the same surname used to inhabit this site until 1809. Photo Marcus Lepola.

The system of allotment ended in Finland as a result of the Russian annexation of 1809 and crofts were therefore abandoned and repurposed by the villagers. The boatsmen and their families often resettled as farm hands and crofters or had to move to towns to find other means of income. Place names that refer to boatsmen as well as remains after boatsmen's crofts are still found all around the Finnish archipelago as a remainder of this period in time when Finland was part of the Swedish kingdom.

Sources

Spis-Ordning, Utfärdad af Förvaltningen af Sjö-ärenderne Til Efterrättelse för Arméens Flotta, då brist af en eller annan Proviantpersedel kan inträffa, af dem, som likmätig Kongl. Maj:ts den 18 April 1796 i Nåder faststälde Spis-Ordning består.

Facimil utgåva av "Statistiskt sammandrag af svenska indelningsverket, 2: bandet av C. Grill från 1856", utgiven av Svenska Släktforskningsförbundet 1988.

Archives

Swedish Naval Archive 1788-1790, Riksarkivet. <https://sok.riksarkivet.se>

Korpo parish archives in the Hiski online database, <https://hiski.genealogia.fi/hiski?fi+t3515124>

Svensksund AD1790 – *Kadotettu Ruotsinsalmi*



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