**The Evolution of the Swedish Carolean Uniform**

The uniform worn by the Swedish soldiers in the Great Northern War is the most iconic in Swedish history and is commonly referred to as the “Carolean Uniform”. In the popular imagination it consisted of a tricorne hat, a knee long blue coat with yellow turnbacks, collar and small cuffs together with yellow breeches and knee long stockings. Furthermore, the coat would have horizontal pocket flaps with five corners and up to seven buttons. This is the classic appearance of the Carolean uniform and it is usually the one shown in modern illustrations.

However, a long held opinion in uniformology has been that there were two distinct Carolean uniforms, separated by the year 1706, and that only the younger uniform looked like the classic Carolean uniform. The older uniform had a coat with no collar, large cuffs, and double vertical pocket flaps on each side. The basis of this claim is a preserved coat in the Swedish Army Museum which is dated to the late 17th century. The only other preserved coats are from the Norwegian campaigns of 1716 and 1718, worn by Charles XII, his brother-in-law Frederick of Hesse and lieutenant Drakenhielm (the latter might however be a recycled coat from the 1690s and is conspicuously missing a collar). This view is presented as a fact in Erik Bellander’s book “*Dräkt och uniform*” from 1973, which is the major work of reference for the evolution of Swedish uniforms. But since then more research has been done on this topic, casting doubts on the theory of an older and a younger Carolean uniform.

The most extensive research of Carolean uniforms has been done by Lars-Eric Höglund and unlike the more general approach of Bellander his work covers each individual regiment in the army. He has gradually abandoned the traditional theory of the so called “Older Carolean Uniform” being in use until 1706. The first version of his uniform book (in Swedish) was published in 1995, with an English translation the following year. In that book he argued that the older uniform must have been abandoned already in the early 1690s because of all the modern features in uniforms from that time. To cover the resulting time gap he proposed to introduce the concept of a third Carolean uniform type (the intermediate Carolean uniform) which according to him evolved into the younger uniform which he still dated to 1706.

However, Höglund’s view had changed even further when he later began to publish uniform books covering Sweden’s opponents. These consisted of two volumes in Swedish from 2003-04 which were then published in a combined volume when it was translated to English in 2006. In the preface to the first of the Swedish volumes, Höglund noted that an old illustration from 1696 contained a picture of drummers from Nyland regiment who clearly were not wearing the uniform issued to them in 1696. Hence it had to be the one which had been issued to them in 1688. But the uniform did not look like the so called Older Carolean Uniform, instead it looked like the uniforms worn in the Scanian War 1675-79. Höglund’s conclusion was that the preserved coat in the Army Museum most likely was a rejected prototype and that the Swedish army continued to use the Scanian War type uniform until it was replaced by the classic Carolean Uniform in the 1690s.

**The Coat**

Before the Swedish army adopted the Carolean Uniform they wore the uniform used during the Scanian War 1675-79. Its main component was the “justaucorps”, a knee-long coat of French origin which spread to all of Western Europe during the latter half of the 17th century and would then be the dominant fashion for well over a century. It came to Sweden c. 1670 and replaced the older jackets, which originally had ended at the waist although they too had gotten quite long at the time the justaucorps arrived. The Carolean coat would evolve from this early justaucorps, with most of the changes intended to make it more suitable for campaigns rather than to imitate civilian fashion.

The main differences between the Scanian War coat and the classic Carolean coat were the former’s larger cuffs, no collar, no turnbacks and rectangular pocket flaps. The pocket flaps were however in both cases horizontal so in that regard nothing changed, if indeed the preserved Army Museum uniform was just a rejected prototype. The Scanian War coat also had “edges” (lace) in the facing colour. The row of buttons on the front covered the entire length of the coat until 1706 when they were supposed to end at the waist. But even in the 1670s there were no buttonholes below the waist so those buttons were just decorations.

These changes may however have been implemented gradually and frequent regimental variation makes it even more difficult to point to a certain date as the “birth” of the Carolean Uniform. The Guard had for example collars already in the 1670s. The traditional date of 1687 is nevertheless still useful since the most visually striking change was implemented that year. On 29 May 1687 Charles XI ordered that all infantry colonels should be sent letters with blue cloth samples, declaring that their regiments henceforth should dress their regiments in coats with that colour (and in most cases this also meant yellow facings). [[1]](#footnote-1)

The Scanian War uniforms had come in all kinds of colour combinations. Rather than having a national colour common to all regiments, Sweden had decided in a regulation from 1675 to give each regiment a distinct colour combination, often inspired by their provincial coat of arms. This regulation was still in use immediately after the war when new uniforms were issued to all regiments. Since the uniforms of provincial regiments saw very little wear and tear during peace time, this set of uniforms would be in use for a whole decade. It was when these post-war uniforms were due to be replaced that Charles XI ordered the change to blue coats in 1687.

A record from 1683 show that the contemporary uniforms still were of the Scanian War type. The coat was supposed to consist of 4 ells cloth (with a width of 2.25 ells) in the regimental colour and an additional 0.5 ell cloth to cuffs and edges[[2]](#footnote-2). A Swedish ell was 0.593804 metre long.

The first generation of Carolean uniforms (issued 1688-1694) had the same amount of cloth as the earlier uniforms but less of it seem to have been allocated to facings, which is down to about a 0.25 of an ell. This reduction might have been caused by the disappearance of decorated “edges” on the uniforms. Collars were however planned for Björneborg’s uniforms in the early 1680s[[3]](#footnote-3) and they were included in the coats issued to the Dal-regiment in 1690 and for Nyland regiment in 1696 so it is thus plausible that the “edges” were directly replaced by collars when the new Carolean uniforms were issued. Although when Jönköping regiment was issued new uniforms in 1692 only the corporals were given collars.[[4]](#footnote-4) In any case, a document from the year 1700 clearly states that all infantry coats were to have collars.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Another cause for the reduction of cloth allocated for facings is likely the introduction of the most distinctively Swedish feature of the Carolean uniform, namely the small square size cuffs. Civilian and international fashion dictated very large cuffs, but these were highly impractical when soldiers handled their weapons, so Charles XI insisted that his army should have small cuffs. While the privates’ uniforms generally conformed to the King’s demand, the officers proved more reluctant. Officers’ uniforms were not issued by the Crown so they had to acquire them with their own money and many bought coats with cuffs of a more fashionable size. Several illustrations from this time also depict officers with much larger cuffs than those worn by the men they commanded. Charles XI, however, did not look kindly to this and complained to the colonel if he saw large officer cuffs when he mustered his troops.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Despite the officers’ reluctance, the general trend appears to have been that the size of cuffs shrank in size over time. Battle paintings illustrating the Scanian War usually do not depict the very big cuffs found in the original French fashion but cuffs of a more moderate size[[7]](#footnote-7). If we assume that the length of the cloth allocated to facings equals the length of the cuffs, then the Dal-regiment was issued 22.26 cm (3/8 of an ell) long cuffs in 1690. This was however most likely unusually large cuffs while Närke-Värmland’s 14.85 cm (1/4 of an ell) was probably standard at this time. The latter size is also repeated for Jämtland regiment in 1710. But Södermanland was issued 11 cm (1.5/8 of an ell) long cuffs in 1702. And Kronoberg was issued 7.4 cm (1/8 of an ell) long cuffs in 1718 which is also the same size as the cuffs on Charles XII’s preserved uniform from the same year. The uniform lieutenant Drakenhielm wore when he died in 1718 have however 12-13 cm long cuffs[[8]](#footnote-8), though as previously stated it might have been a recycled coat from the 1690s.

Other than size, Swedish cuffs also differed from the more fashionable international cuffs in the way which they were fastened on the sleeves. They were not fastened with buttons and instead sewn on to the sleeves. The backside of the Swedish cuff may have had a slit which enabled the soldier to reach three small buttons at the end of each sleeve. This was at least the case for the Guard and the three preserved Carolean uniforms

Another distinctive Swedish feature on the coat was the early adoption of turnbacks. Exactly when this happened is however not known. The cavalry is depicted by the painter Johann Philipp Lemke (1631-1711) to occasionally wear turnbacks during the Scanian War, although those paintings are probably anachronistic. A picture from 1696 does however show cavalrymen from Nylsnd Regiment with turnbacks. Later some cavalrymen, but none of the infantry, are shown with turnbacks in illustrations by Daniel Stawert (died c. 1711) and Johan Lithén (1663-1725) of the battles of Narva and Düna, which were made not long after the events occurred. Hooks used for turnbacks are also noticeably absent in the detailed specifications of the materiel used for uniforms to Södermanland infantry regiment, Swedish Life Regiment on Foot and the Pomeranian Cavalry Regiment in 1700-02. But the cavalrymen at Södra Skånska were instructed to turn back their coats in 1702. The evidence would thus suggest that Swedish soldiers in general did not wear turnbacks in the early years of the war, at least not the infantry. Erik Bellander has however suggested that there likely was a transition period during which the soldiers on occasion had their coats turned back for practical reasons (such as riding, marching and fighting) but otherwise wore them as fashion dictated until turnbacks became a permanent feature of the uniform.[[9]](#footnote-9) A possible date for the latter could be 1706 when Charles XII ordered that there should be no buttons on the coat below the waist. Since these buttons had been mere decorations from the very beginning, the permanent adoption of turnbacks would have made them completely redundant. Also noteworthy is that a famous painting of Charles XII was made in 1706 with the usual turnbacks on his coat. The text on that painting explicitly states that it shows how Charles XII was dressed when he was on campaign in 1700.

The year 1706 has traditionally been the date for the birth of the “Younger Carolean Uniform”. This is because of the above mentioned letter which not only ordered the reduction of the buttons, but also declared that the uniforms should be wider. The latter meant increasing the amount of cloth from the usual 4 to 4.5 ells to as much as 5.5 ells per coat. The extra amount of cloth would have been used to increase the number of folds on the lower part of the coat, thus enabling the “bell shape” of a true justaucorps. 5.5 ells was the amount of cloth an NCO of the Guard was required to have already in 1699. Officers and NCOs generally had coats that were not just of better quality but also consisted of more cloth. However, as far as the privates are concerned there is nothing that suggests that the increase to 5.5 ells cloth was a permanent one. In all likelihood Charles XII just took advantage of the fact that his new luxurious uniforms in 1706-07 were paid for by generous contributions from the Saxon tax payers. When the Swedish army had to be restored after Poltava the new uniforms had the same dimensions as before 1706. The only lasting change was the buttons.

**Buttons**

Throughout this time period the number of buttons on the coat varied, although the general trend was that they decreased. The Scanian War coat generally had just 30-32 buttons[[10]](#footnote-10), but the Guard decorated their coats with as many as 48 buttons[[11]](#footnote-11). From 1680 to 1699 it was regulated that Guard coats should have just 36 buttons[[12]](#footnote-12) and this was also the number that was used when the first Carolean uniforms were issued to the provincial regiments c. 1690[[13]](#footnote-13). At least two regiments decided however that 36 buttons were not enough. Närke-Värmland’s coats (worn until 1705[[14]](#footnote-14)) had 42 buttons and the Dal-regiment’s coats (worn until 1701) had 48 buttons.

From 1699 Guard coats were regulated to have just 26 large buttons and six small ones (the latter were for the sleeves).[[15]](#footnote-15) The regular regiments may have suffered greater reductions as three of them were issued coats with 30 buttons in 1702. Furthermore, a cavalry coat for the Livregemente was to have 24 buttons in 1706[[16]](#footnote-16) and about the same time an infantry regiment (de la Gardie’s) was to have just 21 buttons.[[17]](#footnote-17)

After Poltava, even the restored Guard was issued coats with just 19 buttons, the same as the restored Adelsfana regiment. The Guard would later have their button count increased to 24 large buttons and six small ones when Charles XII returned to Sweden (regulation of 1716). And at least two regiments were issued coats with 21 buttons (Jämtland in 1710 and Västgöta 5-männings in 1712). But Kronoberg regiment was issued coats with just 18 buttons in 1714.

The reason for the reduction of buttons could be economical, especially after 1709, but the decision in 1706 to not have buttons below the waist was probably due to fashion (permanent turnbacks?) and must account for a very large share of the reduction. A specification of where the buttons were located can be found for the Guard in 1707:[[18]](#footnote-18)

* 11-12 on the front, depending on the length of the soldier
* 1 on each side (of the waist)
* 3 on each pocket flap (5 for corporals)
* 3 (small) at the end of each sleeve

All in all this meant 19 or 20 large buttons and six small buttons. This was less than the 1699 regulation required, but that is likely caused by the 1706 decision to eliminate buttons below the waist.

Note that this specification makes no mention of buttons for shoulder straps. The three preserved Carolean coats did not have shoulder straps either. The Adelsfana uniform of 1709 did however have one button allocated for a shoulder strap intended for the carbine belt, so this might have been standard for cavalry uniforms but not for the infantry.

The fact that guardsmen should only have three buttons on each pocket flap is also noteworthy because modern illustrations usually depict Carolean pocket flaps with seven buttons. The fact is that there is no reference for private soldiers to have been issued anything but three buttons on their pocket flaps during the Great Northern War. The Livregemente (in 1700) and the Adelsfana (in 1709) are also reported to have had just three buttons. Regulations from 1727 and 1729 state however that cavalrymen and dragoons should have five buttons on their pocket flap, but that were in the post-war era.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The reason for the seven buttons misconception is that all three preserved Carolean coats have that number of buttons on their pocket flaps. But those coats belonged to royalties and officers and are not representative for private soldiers. The number of buttons on the pocket flaps was clearly an indication of rank and an illustration from 1693 show how the various ranks of the Guard were distinguished at that time:[[20]](#footnote-20)

* 9 buttons for officers
* 7 buttons for NCOs and private drabants
* 5 buttons for corporals
* 3 buttons for private guardsmen

For at least the latter two categories this arrangement was still in effect for the Guard in 1707. And we also have examples from other regiments where the total number of buttons for the coat differed between ranks. Närke-Värmland’s coats from the 1690s had 42 buttons for privates and 54 for corporals. The Dal-regiment had at the same time 48 buttons for privates and an astonishing 96 buttons for NCOs and officers!

Portraits of officers who fought in the Great Northern War show us that they could have anything from three to twelve buttons on their pocket flaps. Apparently the regimental variation was great and we cannot assume that the seven button pocket flap worn by Charles XII, his brother-in-law and lieutenant Drakenhielm represented a widespread standard for showing an officer’s rank.

Besides counting buttons, the illustrations from 1693 are also interesting because they depict the classic Carolean Uniforms’s horizontal pocket flaps with five corners, thus implying that they were included from the very beginning.

**Headgear**

The Swedish army had two basic types of headgear, either the hat made of felt or the “karpus” which was a cap with flaps and usually made of cloth. Both types had coexisted in the Swedish army even before the introduction of the Carolean uniform and would continue to do so throughout the Great Northern War. The former was at first a wide brimmed hat which then evolved into a tricorne. Exactly when this transition occurred is not known since written sources do not distinguish between these two hats. The transition is also obscured by the fact that the karpus was the most widely used headgear when the hat fashion changed.

The karpus became much more common after the end of the Scanian War, and when the Swedish provincial regiments received their first Carolean uniforms in the late 1680s and early 1690s they appear to have been exclusively issued the karpus. The great advantage with this type of headgear was that it was well suited for the cold Swedish climate, with the men being able to pull down the flaps to protect their ears. The downsides were that it was more expensive and that it likely was viewed by many as a form of peasant clothing unbecoming of soldiers. The latter point is strongly implied by the fact that officers continued to wear the more fashionable hats even when their privates were issued karpus. Already in the late 1690s a move back to hats is noticeable among the cavalry regiments, which were soon to be followed by the infantry in the early years of the war. Enlisted regiments also seem to have had little interest in the karpus throughout this time period.

In the early battles of the Great Northern War all Swedish infantry regiments wore karpus, with the only exceptions being the Guard and newly raised 3-männing regiments. But when the Russian campaign started in 1707 all Swedish regiments in the main army wore hats, with Västerbotten regiment being the only exception. The karpus did continue to be issued to regiments in the latter half of the war, but it was by then a much rarer sight. The distribution of the two types of headgear also had a clear geographical pattern in that it was the northern regiments who were the last to abandon the karpus.

The earliest illustration of what looks to be a Swedish soldier wearing a tricorne hat is from 1696 and it depicts an officer of Tavastehus regiment. Later two separate sources, a painting of a member of the Princess’ drabant corps in 1704 and a manual from 1705 with drawings of artillerymen, clearly show them wearing tricornes. But paintings of the early battles of Narva and Düna by Daniel Stawert suggest that the hats were still in a transition phase then with many different styles of hats in use. Some have hats with three sides folded up, but usually there were just two sides folded up although this was done in many different variants. Many hats had for example two sides folded up so that it looked like a tricorne from the front but like a wide brimmed hats from the back. After Düna there is no contemporary battle painting showing these details until Magnus Rommel (1678-1735) illustrated the battle of Gadebusch, and he depicts the entire army wearing tricornes.

There was also a third type of headgear in the Swedish army, namely the grenadier cap. That was however a very rare sight since Swedish grenadiers generally did not wear those. Of well over a hundred infantry units only thirteen are known to at some point in time have worn grenadier caps during the Great Northern War.

There actually was a proposition put forward in 1700 to equip the grenadiers with caps just like the Dutch and German armies did, but Charles XII rejected it.[[21]](#footnote-21) Obviously there was no ban against grenadier caps in the Swedish army, but any colonel who wanted to equip his soldiers with those had to pay for them with his own money.

The first reference of Swedish grenadier caps is from 1691 when the Dal-regiment purchased a set. But as previously mentioned the Dal-regiment distinguished itself during the 1690s by having very extravagant uniforms. Nevertheless, when the regiment increased its number of grenadiers by 50 % in 1693 the new grenadiers had to wear the karpus since no additional grenadier caps were purchased.[[22]](#footnote-22)

It is not known what the Dal-regiment’s grenadier caps looked like, but we have descriptions and preserved caps from other regiments and from these samples it is clear that the variation was great. There were for example caps completely made of cloth as well as those with a bear skin brim or a brass plate. Since there was no regulation the design was completely up to personal taste of each colonel.

The most well-known preserved Swedish grenadier cap belonged to De la Gardie’s regiment and it was taken by the Russians when Narva fell to them in 1704. This cap is blue with red facings, just like the uniform of the Narva garrison regiment. Unfortunately misconceptions caused by black and white photos have led to more than one illustration with incorrect colourations. One of these can be found in a colour plate in the Osprey campaign series book on the battle of Poltava where a large part of the front is incorrectly blue. The Osprey book has also incorrectly depicted the grenadier as wearing a blue coat with yellow facings instead of the red facings found on the cap. This particular mistake has since then regrettably been copied by several other illustrators and painters.

**Hair**

Swedish soldiers were since the 1680s required to wear their hair in a black pouch.[[23]](#footnote-23) The only exception being the artillery which could let their hair hang free. This regulation would remain in place until the 1720s when it was replaced by the Prussian inspired soldier's queue, or pigtail as it is also called.[[24]](#footnote-24) This change in hair fashion would be the only distinctive feature that separated the appearance of Swedish soldiers in the Great Northern War from those in the Seven Years War four decades later. Paintings do show however that despite of this soldiers did not always have a hair pouch. Furthermore, two officers wearing a queue can be found as early as in the illustration of the battle of Gadebusch made by Magnus Rommel.

**Neckcloth**

The neckcloth was originally tied at the front with a separate and different coloured ribbon to form a cravat. But in the late 1690s this changes into the Great Northern War practice of tying the neckcloth behind the neck. The ribbon used to tie the neckcloth disappears at the same time and interestingly the Guard was in 1697 permitted to use the money previously spent on those ribbons for acquiring hat lace instead.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The colour of Swedish army neckcloths was originally black but Charles XI did not like that colour and the first Carolean uniforms saw much diversity in colour choices between the regiments. At the end of the 1690s however, the black colour came back and together with white they were to be the dominant neckcloth colours in the army during the Great Northern War, even though other colours still occurred.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**Piecoat and Cloak**

When the first Carolean uniforms were issued around the year 1690 an overcoat called piecoat was included. This item was usually made of grey “*vadmal*” (coarse wool) with blue facings and was used both to keep the soldier warm and to protect the regular coat from bad weather. But Charles XI decided already c. 1692 that the soldiers should be issued cloaks made of cloth (usually blue with the collar and lining in the regimental colour). Since the cloak had the same function as the piecoat, this had the effect that the cloak soon replaced the piecoat altogether.[[27]](#footnote-27) Drummers would however continue to wear the piecoat throughout the period. The piecoat made a brief comeback among privates after Poltava when almost all of the restored infantry regiments appear to have been issued this instead of the cloak (only Västmanland is known to have received cloaks).This measure was taken for economic reasons and later in the war several of these regiments are known to have had cloaks again.

While other reforms of the Swedish uniform during this time period served the purpose to make them more suitable for military use, the wide scale adoption of cloaks seem to have been motivated by aesthetics rather than functionality. The colonel of Västerbotten regiment wanted in 1696 to get rid of them by stating that his soldiers had too many items of clothes to carry on the march and that the cloak took longer time to dry than the piecoat. He did however acknowledge that the cloak did much to increase the stature of the soldiers while on parade, although he claimed that this was only needed for soldiers garrisoning cities where foreigners could see them[[28]](#footnote-28). The king was however not convinced by this complaint and the cloak would remain a part of the Carolean uniform.

**“Släpmundering”**

Another grey *vadmal* coat issued to the Swedish soldiers was a part of the outfit that was called “*släpmundering*”, a term that could be translated to “work-clothes”. The regular uniform was called “*livmundering*” and the army took great lengths to avoid unnecessary wear and tear to this uniform. For example, provincial soldiers had to keep their *livmundering* sealed in coffins during peace time and be subjected to regular inspections of their condition. They were only allowed to wear the *livmundering* during the annual regimental drill (not even during the monthly company drills)[[29]](#footnote-29). So when soldiers had to do tasks that posed a risk of getting their cloths dirty or even ruined, then they wore their *släpmundering* in grey *vadmal* instead.

Grey *vadmal* (= undyed coarse wool) was a much cheaper material since it cost less than half of the blue cloth. So when the Swedish army had to be restored after Poltava, the Defence commission considered to issue grey *vadmal* coats instead of a proper “*livmundering*” in order to save money. They relented however after hearing numerous objections accusing such a move to be counterproductive because blue cloth was more durable than *vadmal,* also better for preserving the men’s health and better for their moral since it meant that their uniforms would distinguish them from ordinary peasants.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Nevertheless, there are numerous examples of regiments being issued only a *släpmundering* and not a *livmundering* during the Great Northern War. For example the first uniforms issued to the newly raised 3-männing infantry regiment were all in grey *vadmal*. The Swedish state finances during the war were anything but good so compromises had to be made.

**Vest and Breeches**

Underneath the coat a vest was worn which despite the modern meaning of that term actually had sleeves. The vest was together with the breeches usually made of leather. Like in other armies a transition from leather to cloth can be noticed in the Great Northern War. The uniforms of the 1690s had these items almost exclusively made of leather while cloth became more common after the outbreak of the war, although leather would remain the dominant material in the Swedish army throughout the war.

The upside with leather was that it was a much more durable material. Cloth was on the other hand more comfortable as it unlike leather did not take so long to dry after it had been wet.

**Stockings, Shoes and Gaiters**

The infantry were usually issued two pairs of knee long stockings in the regimental colour (although each pair could have a different colour). They were also issued a pair of “marching stockings” which were usually grey and intended to be used while marching to save the regular stockings from wear and tear.

In a similar fashion the foot soldiers were also issued two different pair of shoes, a pair of “Swedish shoes” and a pair of “German shoes”. The latter came with a buckle and closely followed the civilian fashion. The “Swedish shoes” were also called “marching shoes” and might properly have been called boots. These were more suitable for marching, trench work and walking in snow but were of course not as pretty as the German styled shoes.

A feature on both types of shoes as well as the cavalry boots was that they did not follow the shape of the foot. The right shoe and the left shoe had the same shape and ended with a flat vertical front. This peculiar shoe fashion existed in Sweden from the 1640s to the 1760s[[31]](#footnote-31) but it is a common mistake among modern illustrators to depict shoes from this period with a rounded shape.

The Swedish marching shoes were however not enough to protect the soldiers’ legs from the elements. A precursor to the gaiters were the so called over-stockings which were pulled over the regular stockings. Actual gaiters are also known to have been used by several regiments in the latter half of the Great Northern War.

**Cavalry uniforms**

The cavalry uniforms differed more from the infantry than the fact that they had cavalry boots instead of shoes. They were also supposed to have a cuirass underneath their coat which meant that it had to be wider than the infantry coat. Although, judging from some paintings, cuirasses might also have been worn over the coat. In any case the Swedish cuirasses retained its natural steel colour and were not blackened for rust protection as was usually done to Swedish sword hilts (and for Danish cuirasses).

The cuirasses were however not popular among the men and it was very common that the men “lost” them during campaign. For example, Södra Skånska regiment reported that they in 1703 only had 354 cuirasses left and in the following year only a handful remained. The lost cuirasses were replaced though and offenders were punished, at least in the main army as Charles XII apparently was adamant that his cavalry should wear them. But elsewhere the enforcement of the regulation seems to have been less strict. Cuirasses are completely absent from lists of equipment in Lewenhaupt’s army. And a manufacturer of cuirasses complained in 1711 that they had not received any commissions in years, which strongly suggest that the restored regiments after Poltava were not issued cuirasses. It was not until 1716 that the manufacturer received new commissions, and this was most likely a result of Charles XII’s return to Sweden.

Also worn underneath the coat in the early days of the Carolean uniform was the buff coat (“kyller”) which originally had preceded the justaucorps as the primary cavalry coat. But as an undergarment the buff coat was soon replaced with the vest used by the infantry. When war broke out in 1700 the Swedish cavalry wore their leather vests on campaign and left the buff coats at home.[[32]](#footnote-32)

While 1687 is commonly referred to as the year when dark blue became the standard Swedish coat colour, it is worth mentioning that this at first only applied to the infantry. When the war started only six of the 14 provincial cavalry units had dark blue coats. The largest and most prestigious, Livregementet, wore together with Södra Skånska light blue uniforms. All Finnish units as well as the Adelsfana and Jämtland Cavalry Company wore grey coats. And the Bohuslän Dragoon squadron wore very distinctive green coats. However, dark blue became the standard colour for the newly raised regiments and in the early half of the war the older regiments switched to dark blue as well. The one exception was the Bohuslän dragoons who successfully resisted these attempts and would remain green throughout the 18th century.

**Artillery uniforms**

The artillery was also exempted from the 1687 reform and continued to wear grey coats with blue facings until they gradually transitioned to all blue uniforms during the first half of the war.

They also distinguished themselves by not wearing hair pouches or turnbacks during the Great Northern War, although they would adopt them in the 1720s.

**Officers and NCOs**

As previously mentioned the number of buttons on the pocket flaps was used to distinguish the different categories of rank in the Swedish army. Officers and NCOs were furthermore distinguished from the men by having all blue uniforms and not facings and stockings in the regimental colour, although this was not the case in all regiments. Officers would have gold lace on their hats and coats while NCOs had silver lace instead. However, the cavalry frequently had silver hat lace for the privates (and occasionally gold lace too) so it was not uncommon for cavalry NCOs to have gold lace instead of silver.

Unlike the other European armies, Swedish officers did not wear a sash. Infantry officers and drabants did however wear a gorget as rank insignia. And just like their cavalry colleagues, infantry officers were also supposed to have cuirasses (though if they actually did is a completely different matter).

During the Great Northern War Swedish officers was to have the following appearance of their gorgets and parade coat in accordance to their rank (the latter also includes cavalry officers):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Gorget[[33]](#footnote-33)** | **Parade coat[[34]](#footnote-34)** |
| **Colonels** | Gilded silver with the royal cypher and other decorations (lions?) in enamel. | Was allowed to distinguish himself from his subordinates with as much as he could afford. |
| **Lieutenant Colonels & Majors** | Gilded silver with the royal cypher and palm wreaths in enamel | Wide gold lace on cuffs and pocket flaps. Buttons and buttonholes decorated in gold. |
| **Captains** | Gilded silver with the royal cypher in blue enamel | Narrow gold lace on cuffs and pocket flaps. Buttons and buttonholes decorated in gold.  |
| **Lieutenants & Ensigns** | Polished silver with the royal cypher in gold | Buttons and buttonholes decorated in gold. |

The table above describe the parade coat but the regulation also stipulates that in addition to that company officers should have a plain blue coat with blue cloth buttons while on guard duty or in camp. Furthermore a third coat was to be grey with pewter buttons and used for marching. [[35]](#footnote-35)

All this was however just regulation, reality could be very different. Officers had to purchase their own uniforms and it was common to save money by not fully comply with the demands of the regulation. For example, there are over 60 preserved gorgets that were captured at Poltava and almost half of these do not have the royal cypher. 15 gorgets are made of copper but 11 of those do have the royal cypher. [[36]](#footnote-36)

The economic difficulties seem to have been exceptionally harsh for the officers of Jämtland regiment who were protecting the Norwegian border up north. In 1708 they are reported to have had half-pikes (spontoons) and gorgets of the prescribed model, although the latter were of brass instead of silver. Everything else though, such as clothes, cuirasses, swords, muskets, wagons and tents were missing because of their poverty, bad harvests and the fact that for six years they had only received half pay.

**Uniform Quality**

It might have been intended that privates also should have had three different coats. Although the sources generally only speak of two types of uniforms; the regular “*livmundering*” and the work clothes called “*släpmundering*”, they do use the latter term to describe two types of clothes; either an outfit of grey *vadmal* which had been manufactured for the sole purpose of being used as work clothes, or an older *livmundering* that had been replaced by a new one. The grey *vadmal* outfit could have been used for work where there was a risk of getting dirty while the older *livmundering* could have been used as an everyday uniform. Thus a similar arrangement to that of the officers who were supposed to have three types of coat. There is evidence to support this theory and that is a letter from the colonel of Västerbotten regiment who in 1699 addressed the difficulties in storing three sets of uniforms, one of which was as old as from 1683.[[37]](#footnote-37)

But even though it might have been intended that soldiers should have had three sets of uniforms, reality was different and Swedish soldiers would be fortunate if they had just two sets of uniform. As previously stated there are numerous examples of regiments who had to wear their grey *släpmundering* because they had not been issued a *livmundering*. There might also have been cases of regiments not being issued any uniforms at all. The national militia regiments in the German provinces, which were raised in 1710, have no records of uniforms and captured militia soldiers are described in Danish sources as wearing peasants’ clothes.

The idea of using an older *livmundering* as everyday clothes was probably not realistic, because by the time a regiment was issued new uniforms, the old uniform would have been so worn out that it would not be in an acceptable condition. In 1693 it was decided that a provincial regiment should receive a new uniform every seventh year[[38]](#footnote-38). An enlisted regiment would however need new uniforms every second year (later every third year) since they were full time soldiers.[[39]](#footnote-39) But as always, regulation was one thing, reality was different. When war broke out in 1700, most of the Swedish army’s uniforms were past their expiration date. Just look at the following sample of regiments for which the terms of the first Carolean uniforms are known.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Post Scanian War Uniform** | **First Carolean Uniform** | **Second Carolean Uniform** |
| **Dal-regiment** | 1681 | 1690 | 1702? |
| **Hälsinge** | ? | 1693 or 1694 | 1701 |
| **Jönköping** | 1681 | 1692 | 1704? |
| **Kronoberg** | ? | 1692 | 1702 |
| **Närke-Värmland** | Not earlier than 1681 | 1691 | 1704-05 |
| **Skaraborg** | 1679 | 1689 | 1701 |
| **Södermanland** | ? | Not later than 1690 | 1702 |
| **Uppland** | 1683 | 1691 | 1701/02 |
| **Älvsborg** | ? | 1687 | 1709 |
| **Östergötland** | 1681 | 1692 | 1701 |

Apart from maybe Hälsinge, no regiment in the sample above received new uniforms within seven years. And yet the most extreme example is not included here; Jämtland regiment was issued uniforms in 1682/83 which were not replaced until 1709[[40]](#footnote-40). Not even the enlisted soldiers of the Guard got new uniforms within seven years; those that were issued in 1695 were not replaced until 1704.

A likely reason why the regiments did not receive new uniforms in the late 1690s is the fact that a series of bad harvests culminated in the years 1695-97 and resulted in what is probably the worst famine in Swedish history. It is thus understandable that the government felt there were more important things to spend money on than to buy new uniforms for its army.

Nevertheless, when the war started both the old and the newly raised regiments needed uniforms and this put a great strain on the Swedish finances. Priorities had to be made and those regiments who stayed home in Sweden, such as Jämtland, had to wait very long for new uniforms. Many of these did however receive new uniforms in time for the Danish invasion of 1709. Not so fortunate was however the Skånska 3-männing cavalry regiment which already when it was raised in 1700 received a decade old uniforms from Södra Skånska Regiment. These were in an appalling condition when they confronted the Danes in 1709 and they suffered wide scale desertions, although they did receive partial replacements in time for the battle of Helsingborg.

While the Swedish uniforms left much to desire at the beginning of the war, things did improve somewhat. The main army that left Saxony for Russia in 1707 was probably the finest looking Swedish army during the entire war. And while conditions were not good during the Scanian campaign of 1709-10, the uniforms were at least new. However, the attrition rate was high during a campaign and the musters held in the summer after the short Scanian campaign reveal considerable losses in material. One of the less fortunate regiments, the 1 100 men strong Kronoberg, reported that the following items had been lost since the last muster:[[41]](#footnote-41)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 353 | Blue coats |
| 175 | Piecoats |
| 158 | Hats |
| 179 | Leather vests |
| 275 | Leather breeches |
| 1 100 | Black neckcloths |
| 1 100 | Brass shoe buckles |
| 1 100 | Knee straps for stockings |

It was under dire economic conditions that Sweden had to fund replacements for worn out uniforms for the duration of the war as well as restoring yet another lost army in 1713. The quality of the uniforms would therefore vary considerable from regiment to regiment depending on how long it was since they had been issued new uniforms.

**The End of the Carolean Uniform**

The Carolean time period in Swedish history ended with the death of Charles XII in 1718. Thus ended the absolute rule by kings and instead an era of parliamentary rule began. This revolution did however not affect the Swedish army uniform since it would look pretty much the same for nearly half a century afterwards. The only real changes were the hairstyle and a more widespread use of gaiters.

The new regime showed little interest in uniforms other than reducing its costs. The difficult financial situation was not only caused by the huge war debt it had inherited from Charles XII. The territorial losses also meant that a very large share of the tax revenue in the pre-war budget was now gone forever. This loss of tax revenue needed to be compensated for somewhere else. But all the reforms that Charles XII had taken in that direction to fund the war effort was rolled back by the new regime who viewed them as evils of absolutism. So the pre-war tax system remained in place during the entire period of parliamentary rule with a permanent structural budget deficit as a result. Foreign subsidies and temporary taxes had to do to solve any acute crisis, among these two unnecessary and unsuccessful wars started by the Hat party in 1741 and 1757.

Very little money was thus spent on the military and uniforms were replaced at longer intervals than before. In addition the quality of the issued uniforms declined due to widespread corruption during this time period.

A major uniform regulation was introduced in 1756 although it did not bring any real changes to the uniforms apart from declaring that all infantry regiments henceforth should have yellow facings. It was however much more specific than any previous regulation in describing what the uniform should consist of and how often the items should be replaced. The coat for example should now be replaced just every twelfth year.[[42]](#footnote-42) But as always reality was different, the Bohuslän dragoons were still wearing the coats they had been issued in 1748 when a muster was held in 1767.[[43]](#footnote-43)

It was the experience in Pomerania while fighting the Prussians 1757-1762 that would bring the end of the Carolean uniform. Officers complained that it was too difficult to distinguish the different regiments when they all wore identical uniforms. But it must also have been a factor that compared to the other armies fighting in that war the Swedish uniform looked rather plain and old-fashioned. So a new uniform regulation came into being in 1765 which not only increased the diversity of facings colours but also changed the style of the coat so that it would resemble the victorious Prussian army. This uniform was however still a close relative to the Carolean uniform, though it would in its turn be replaced already in 1779 by a radically different uniform. That was the Gustavian uniform, which was designed by the fashion interested king Gustav III in a style that was to be unique for Sweden. But that is a different story.

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