

Early Carolean levy banners

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HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

In the 1650s Denmark-Norway attempted to establish a protectorate in the Baltic and secured Sweden's help in this endeavour. This gave rise to a conflict in western Europe between Denmark-Norway and Sweden, later known as the Scanian War. Charles X Gustav's intervention in 1657 was the turning point in the war. As long

as that point the Swedish army grew very quickly and levies were organized. In charge of the levies were the governors of the different counties. In the County of Schleswig however, the governor in Hamburg county, Gabriel Kank, and Count Magnus Leifeldt De la Gardie - Kank wanted to impose the levy early as soon as possible and De la Gardie wanted to wait. Another reason was that De la Gardie's County, which was part of the Hamburg county, Kank organized the levy in Schleswig except for the part that belonged to Lütten Lutter. The levy was very poor and worked in open fields, leading to great casualties. A significant number of soldiers died during their first battle. Even they had some success until an army of 20,000 men from the region of the Rhine and the Moselle were sent to Schleswig and Lütten Lutter through the winter.

The banner for the levies was as follows:

THE BANNERS

One interesting point is that the Scanian levy banners were very similar to the Scanian levy banners. Kank wrote to his diary that the levy banners for his own war made in 1657 and in 1658. The Scanian levy banners were very similar to the Scanian levy banners. One of the Scanian County banners of the 1650s and 1660s was as follows:

My diary is the Scanian banner, which is the power and strength of the levies by giving the same flag to the Scanian levy banners. I also think they were the Scanian

A couple of years ago I found fragments of at least two banners in our collection which made me very curious. The fragments can be dated to 1676. Geographically they can be placed in Läckö county which, at that time, belonged to Chancellor Count Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, son of Jacob De la Gardie. The banners are made of red and green silk taffeta. In the centre are laurel wreaths framing different motifs. One of the banners pictures a lady in 17th century clothes and the other an unidentifiable dark figure. The texts on one of the banners read "Rackeby gäll", which means Rackeby parish, and "1676". On the other side is written Sunnersbergs gäll (parish) and Läckö. On the other banner are the same texts but the parishes are Källby and Husaby. I grew up near Rackeby and my ancestors lived there in the 17th century so I thought this find was very intriguing. The figures depicted on banners may be the coats-of-arms of the different jurisdictions. The hundred that Husaby and Källby belonged to used to have the Virgin Mary carrying the baby Jesus as their symbol. The hundred that Rackeby and Sunnersberg belonged to used to have a bearded man as coat-of-arms.

Since the parishes appearing on the banners belonged to Läckö County, I researched what happened in this area in 1676, for clues about the banners.

HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

In the 1670s Denmark-Norway attempted to reclaim the provinces in the south and west of Sweden lost in the 1640s and 1650s. Their tactics were to launch an attack on Scania from Denmark and on the west of Sweden from Norway.

The Swedish king, Charles XI, had his headquarters in Vänersborg near the Norwegian border in early 1676. Läckö County is situated quite near Vänersborg. As long

as the King was there, the Norwegian army, led by Ulrik Frederik Gyldenlöve, did not venture any major attacks. But when the King went to Scania with the main army in the spring of 1676 things started to happen. The Norwegian army started to advance across the border and in late June they had conquered the important fortress of Vänersborg. This is known today as the Gyldenlöve conflict.

At this point the Swedish army needed men quickly and levies were organized. In charge of the levies were the governors of the different counties. Soon there was a conflict between the governor in Skaraborg county, Gabriel Kurck, and Count Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie - Kurck wanted to impose the levy ready as soon as possible and De la Gardie wanted to wait. Another reason was that De la Gardie's County, Läckö, was part of Skaraborg county. Kurck organized the levy in Skaraborg except for the area that belonged to Läckö County.

The levy men were not very useful in open battles, lacking experience and equipment. A significant number fled home to their villages during their first battle. Later they became more useful, serving as guards along the important Göta River which flows between Vänersborg and Gothenburg through the woods.

The banners are levy banners used in this war.

THE BANNERS

One interesting point is that other contemporary levy banners are simple and usually locally made; often of linen. Kurck wrote in his diary that the levy banners for his men were made in linen and in a hurry. But as we saw above, the levy banners we have here, from De la Gardie's County, are made of silk taffeta and more decorated.

My theory is that De la Gardie wanted to show his power and position in society by giving his men more expensive levy banners. I also think they were made by

craftsmen who worked at his castle at the time. De la Gardie made new banners for his own regiment in 1675 very similar to the levy banners that were made the year after. Perhaps they were based on his regimental banners.

Some decades later, during the Great Northern War, new levy banners were made and in our collection we have a large number of them. Most are dated 1710. There's actually one from the same village as one of the levy banner fragment from 1676, Rackeby.

As you can see the 1710 banner is made of linen and much simpler than the 1676 silk banner. Läckö County was expropriated by Charles XI in the 1680s and Count Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie died a few years after. So in 1710 there was no distinction between Läckö County and rest of Skaraborg County.

The reason that there are so many levy banners left from the Great Northern War is that during the Finnish war of 1808 they were collected from their churches and sent to Stockholm to be used for temporary troops during that war. They never came to use but were never returned.

SUMMARY

When I started my research into these fragments from 1676 I knew little about them and very little had been written about them. After a couple of weeks of archive studies the fragments from Läckö 1676 could be put in

the very interesting context of the Gyldenlöve conflict. They were no longer anonymous and I hope that in a near future I will be able to dig deeper into the archives and find more information to allow me to write an article about the fragments and the Gyldenlöve conflict.

Further reading: Erstorp, Aron, 'Fragment från Gyldenlövefejden', *Gränsland i krigens skugga.*, s. 73–84, 2012



10.1 Fragments from a levy banner from Husaby dated 1676. Made of silk with painted décor. Inv no: AM 68250. Photo: Armémuseum



10.2 Levy banner from Rackeby dated 1710. Made of linen with painted decor. Inv no: AM 68189. Photo: Armémuseum