

WINTER WAR IN THE NAPOLEONIC TIMES

Skis have been used long before the Napoleonic times, and in Sweden there is a famous competition, called Vasaloppet, which is supposed to replay the flight of (the soon to be King) Gustav Vasa from the province of Dalarna, pursued by the (then de facto Danish king and his) Danish forces (Sweden was a Danish province). This is a ski competition, although today with proper (sorry, modern) skis.

As I said before, skis were different by those times: they were of two different sizes, the small one was covered by reindeer skin and placed with the hair tilted back, so that they would glide easily when moving forwards but grip the ground and give a resistance backwards when you needed traction power. The other ski (the long one) was waxed, so that it would glide easily in any direction. The skier would lean mostly on that long ski when moving passively downslope but use the short one to move uphill, for example. Only one stick was used, more for balance than traction. These skis were effective but, unlike modern ones, you used your body asymmetrically and you probably would not become an Adonis with it.

I have plenty of pictures taken in the museums I refer, but pictures taken with a glass screen in front are often too bad to reproduce. Fortunately, all those museums have guidebooks with most of the items in stunning pictures, so I looked up on the books for better pictures.

I failed to find the picture with Russian peasants on skis attacking the French in 1812. There is in Google Library a good book in English on the War on Finland 1808 written by a contemporaneous Russian general that refers to Finns scouting and attacking their troops in winter with skis, IIRC (Narrative of the Conquest of Finland by the Russians, edited by Monteith, the general has remained incognito).



Skis and ski-stick employed by the ski detachment of the Värmlands Regiment during the War of 1808-1809
(Livruskammaren publication, Stockholm)

och stav för Värmlands
regimentes skidlöparavdelning i
1809 års krig.
75, AM.127677.
1854

ski-stick employed
by detachment of the
1st Regiment during the
1808–09.



The Danish army marched into Norway on 11 March 1814. The Norwegian border posts gave no real notice of the offensive some became bogged down. 11,000 men did indeed arrive, but the blundering of Gustav IV Adolf and the English detachment of the 1st Regiment held by the English compelled in the soldiers leaving without disembararked. The Swedish renewed the summer approach, and then opened solid in the winter chill. The Swedish proposed in March 1809, Christian August, and tempted by, the opportunity to lead the Norwegian forces into Jämtland. A final attack, and back. Thus ended a minor war, and reached in December did not change national borders.

Kung Gustav IV Adolfs diplomatiska klumpighet och det engelska befällets kritiska inställning till Sverige fick som resultat att soldaterna inte ens steg i land. Svenskarna gjorde ett nytt infall med några mindre sammandrabbningar i Norge framåt sommaren, därefter frös verksamheten fast i vinterkylan. I mars 1809 avsattes svenske kungen, Christian August fick och lockades av sitt anbud att bli efterträdare, men tvingades i juli 1809 motvilligt leda sina norska styrkor över gränsen till Jämtland. Ett sista anfall som snart pressades tillbaka. Därmed var det småskaliga kriget över och freden i december innebar inga gränsförändringar.

Skidlöpare

I striderna mot både norrmän och ryssar organiserades skidlöparförband. Såväl manskap som officerare hämtades från indelningsverkets trupper utmed västra och östra riksgränsen – eftersom »dessa regementens soldater äro starka karlar, säkra skyttar,

i allmänhet böjlige och läraktige, samt derjemte ifrån yngre åren vane vid ett strängt lefnadssätt, och att på skidor genomvandra skogarna». På sommaren gjorde de tjänst som jägarsoldater och på vintrarna som skidlöpare.

Anfallet som aldrig blev av

I mars 1808 förberedde danska, franska och spanska trupper ett angrepp mot Skåne. Anfallet skulle ledas av franske marskalken Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, mannen som flera år senare skulle lyckas där Christian August gick bet. Angreppsplanerna smulades sönder av den engelska flottan. En brittisk eskader under amiral Hyde Parkers hade övervintrat utanför Göteborg 1807–1808. Den gick ut tidigt på våren lagom för att lägga sig i vägen för det dansk-franska anfallet. Ett för Sverige lägligt uppror i Spanien tvingade också Napoleon att i stället vända blicken söderut.



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Soldiers on skis

Units on skis were mobilised in combat both against the Norwegians and against the Russians. Both officers and men were recruited from those called up under the allotment system along the western and eastern national borders – since »the soldiers of these regiments are strong men, accurate marksmen, generally obedient and easy to teach, while also from their young years used to severe living, and free motion through the forests on skis.« These troops served as scouts during the summer and as ski-based forces during the winter.

An attack that disappeared

Danish, French and Spanish forces prepared to attack Skåne in March 1808. The attack was to be led by the French marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, the man who several years later would succeed where Christian August failed. The plans for

And from the book *Krigsårene 1807-1814*, Per Erik Rastad from kongsvinger museum in Norway, you can see some illustrations of those soldiers. They were used as scouts, partisans and they were partly irregular, part elite soldiers. In the summer they were used more like common light troops, as skirmishers, riflemen and the like.

eg. Skansen hadde
intet annet å gjøre
eg tilbake. De be-
enskene ble hissige
ved Skinnarbøl og
ble drevet ut og

av åa for å holde
mot Mobekk der

trede mislykkede
komme skansen i
svenskene hadde

rsøk på å ta skan-
ordre om retrett.
gte de retirerende,
kansen. Etter dette
som de var kom-

le sårede fikk man

i betraktning at de

gsmanøvrene ved

forpostene ved Di-
re Lier. De norske
tt til fange.

erkompanier og et
ville krysse elva.

ette fikk særlig
ingsmanøvrene var

Oberst Staffeldt hadde med kikkert betraktet kampene fra en av festnings bastioner. Da stridene var slutt, red han de tilbakevendende tropper i møte og ga uttrykk for sin misnøye.

En offiser ved de lette troppene ga da uttrykk for at dette var svært urettferdig, og han gjorde dette på en slik måte at Staffeldt kunne ha fått ham straffet dersom han hadde ønsket det. Han valgte imidlertid å overse hendelsen og kom senere til å se troppenes innsats på Jaren i et langt gunstigere lys.



Skiløper 1808. (Tegning: A. Hauge)

er i Europa —

ikevel nyss om
over den store

flåtestyrke i de
gent, fikk i sitt
ett måtte flåten

og tilbudet om
åten lå avtaklet.
åtte overgi seg i
nnene hjem med

g dets allierte —
ober samme høst.
ktet mange at en-
tvdeler ble der-
deriblant Norske

e ble sendt hjem i

å fransk side i kam-

1808 og angrep der.
—Norge ikke var av-
med russerne og et

et skulle en felle



Skiløper og almuebe-
væpning 1808.
(Tegning: A. Bloch)

rumplingsforsøk ble en grenaderbataljon under major Müller beordret til Vin-
ger i februar 1808. Samme måned ble samtlige av de sønnafjellske festningene
beordret satt i krigsberedskap.

Før troppene samlet seg langs grensen i mars 1808, ble det sørget for en
foreløpig grensevakt bestående av landvern og almuebevæpning. En spion-
kjede av handelskarer, grensebønder og andre forsøkte å skaffe opplysninger
om troppene på svensk side. Grensevakten bestod dels av faste poster, dels av
skipatroljer. De veier som ikke var bevoktet, ble forhugget — dvs. sperret av
nedhogd, ukvistet tømmer som lå på kryss og tvers.

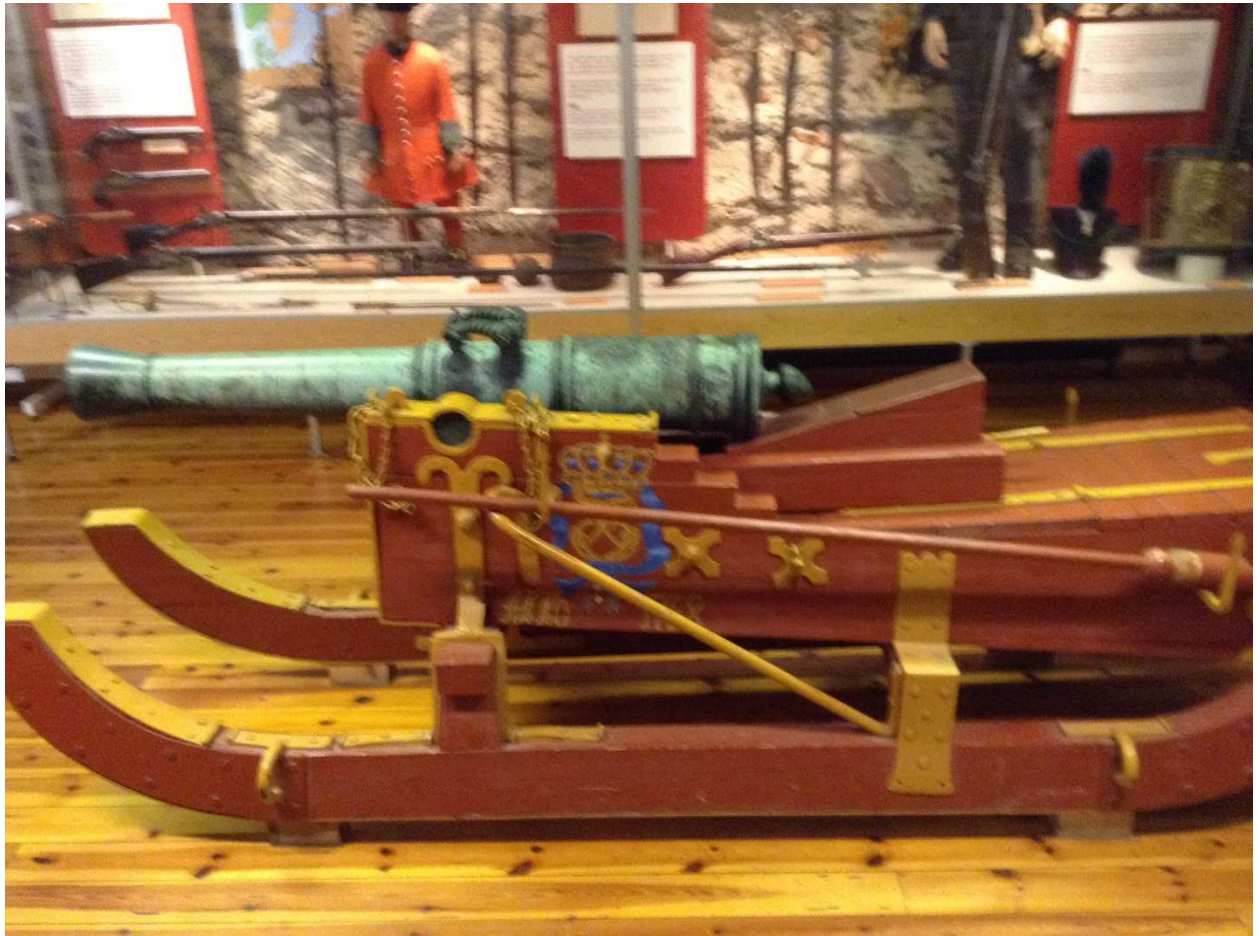


And a fairly good picture of the original uniform of Norwegian jägare troops, taken at Kongsvinger





Kongsvingen museum, Norway. Artillery on skis





These guns could be pulled from both front or rear.

At Moscow museum, the sledge claimed to be the one Napoleon used in the campaign when he left the army, often shown in pictures



And from Moscow too, snow shoes, but I can't vouch for the exact time. It was displayed in the Napoleonic section, though.



In any case, snow shoes, much like the modern ones were used far back in times, as well as studs screwed on horses' shoes to avoid the horses slipping in ice. I think it is de Ségur in *La campagne de la Russie* that complains that the (French) horses weren't equipped with it when they started the retreat and caused many a horse lost in accidents, while they were completely incapable to draught the artillery. So, the French knew the practice well.

I hope this all helps, and I'm sorry if it is presented in bits and pieces, but this is what I could get in my library in the time I could spare. It does, however, reverberates what I said and does give some references. More of it, like how the skis were used or horseshoes with studs you either have to ask me for copies and learn Swedish, French and Russian to read it yourself or just believe that I translated it for you correctly.

Regards

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